



Superstition

A Rational Discourse

Yadnyeshwar Nigale

Translated by Ms Suman Oak



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Lokbhumi Prakashan
Panaji (Goa)

Credits
**Superstition:
A Rational Discourse**

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(Translated by Ms Suman Oak)

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First Edition: June 2012

Layout & Production
Milind Joshi, Anupam Creations, 2/14, Marwa, Anupam Park
Kothrud, Pune 411029

Published & Printed by
Ramesh Kolwalkar
Lokbhumi Prakashan, Roshan Manzil, Near Cine National,
Panaji (Goa) 403001
(Contact: 9763817239/(0832) 2251358)

Cover Design
Sham Bhalekar, Pune

Rs : 150/-



This book is respectfully dedicated to
the memory of

Comrade Narayan Desai
(1920- 2007)

a renowned thinker, philosopher & guide
and wrote profusely and also was an activist
in the progressive and rationalist movements



The Author's Perception

The Indian Society as a whole is beset with innumerable slovenly and unscientific concepts like-fatalism, fate or luck, the cycle of birth and death, Karmasiddhanta (present suffering or good fortune is the fruit of deeds in the previous births), astrology, destiny, miracles, concept of being auspicious or inauspicious, vows, observances and what not. To match with this innumerable orthodox senseless traditions and rituals are blindly followed by most of the Indians. In fact, the whole edifice of the Indian society and its culture is founded on these constructs. The psyche of the people does not allow them to examine any custom or tradition or happening and verify its utility, validity and legitimacy. For them, the age old customs, rituals and traditions, started by their wise forefathers are sacrosanct and beyond any criticism, leave alone any change. It's not that only the poor, ignorant people alone are plagued by this psyche; even the highly educated, science graduates fall prey to this slavish mentality. As a result, for all the advances that science is making, science will still be perceived only as a means of getting good marks to secure a job or enter some profession and earn a comfortable livelihood, as long as, the study of science does not inculcate scientific outlook and scientific method of thinking.

Science affirms that no miracle is possible in this world. Whatever happens in this world has some scientific cause. Things don't happen because of somebody's blessings, by the grace of some deity, miraculously or of their own accord without any cause. But people at large are so enamoured of miracles that for them being able to perform miracles is a god given gift, His blessings. Any petty Baba or Maharaj who displays an equally petty miracle can create admiration with awe for him in people's mind. The Baba then can easily trap these people in his pretenses to exploit and ruin them; all this despite the avowal of science that no miracle is possible.

A bumper crop of superstitions grows in our society everywhere in all social strata. A psyche beset with tradition, the haughty pride of our age old traditions and customs, total lack of logical and critical approach and the mindset that resists any progressive and necessary change, although intellectually approved, hamper the process of eradication of superstitions in the society.

All most all the articles in this book, "Superstition: A Rational Discourse", expose using scientific criteria, some miracle mongering or other that takes place every now and then. Even the so called saintly, renowned Babas who exploit gullible people, behind the façade of

charitable social work are not let out. Although the articles were written at different time as and when the episodes took place, there is a common thread-rationalism- running through all of them.

This book is my second book in the same strain as the first one namely, “Kisse Andhashraddheche” (meaning stories of superstition). Most of the articles in this book have already been published in the local magazines. Advocate Amrit Kasar, a progressive intellectual has been a great guide to me in this effort. Similarly my friend and the editor of “Lok Bhumi” shouldered the responsibility of publishing it. I owe them a lot but prefer to stay indebted to them. I am obliged by Advocate Panduranga Nagavekar for writing a preface to the present book. I copiously thank him.

- *Yadnyeshwar Nigale*

Acknowledgements

Eradication of Superstition is an issue of vital importance for reforming and reconstructing our social structure. It is rationally discussed in “Andhashraddha: Ek Vivekanishtha Vivechan”, the original book in Marathi. Many of my friends felt that the thought of this book should not cater only to the Marathi speaking public but should be made available to a much larger readership. My friend Ramesh Kolwalkar readily accepted the suggestion and decided to publish an English version of it. Ms. Suman Oak has agreed to translate. Prabhakar Nanawaty, an activist and rationalist, has taken the responsibility of editing it and Babu Gogineni, International Director, IHEU, has written the preface to the English version. I am filled with joy that the efforts of all these friends who have succeeded in bringing out this English version. I am heavily indebted to them all. I am also indebted to Deepak Dalvi, Pune, Vaman Bhate, Panaji, Goa and Prakash Muchandi, Goa, for their assistance in bringing out this book. I am thankful to Sham Bhalekar for book cover and Milind Joshi for the layout and production of books.

The dates on which these articles were earlier published in Marathi dailies or magazines (Gomantak, Navaprabha, Taruna Bharat, etc.) are given below each article to enable the reader to put the article in proper chronological perspective. I thank the editors of these dailies and magazines.

Yadnyeshwar Nigale

Preface

(Translation of Marathi Edition)

The social life of Goa, for the last several years, is being polluted by some people who egg on superstitious behavior. Yadyeshwar Nigale could never acquiesce with this tendency and severely criticized it through his public lectures and meetings. Through his writings he exposed many a religious imposters, so thoroughly that they had to take to their heels. Of course, he himself had to face severe criticism from the faithful, especially the Hindus who accused him of not daring to criticize religions other than the Hindu religion. He received many threats from the orthodox communities. But he did not relent. He continues his crusade of eradicating superstition, unabated. This book, 'Superstition: A Rational Discourse' is the sum total of all his endeavours, so far and is the second book of its kind; the first being 'Kisse Andhashraddheche' (meaning stories of superstition).

Mr. Nigale has put across his thoughts, bluntly and frankly enough, through 40 articles and clarified his stand against superstition. The Gomantak (Goa) society ought to be cleansed of the pestilence of superstition. To achieve this task, Mr. Nigale is uniting people against superstition. This book will prove instrumental in spreading his revolutionary thoughts and awakening the people from their religious stupor.

History of all religions tells us that no religion has escaped from superstition. Superstition rises out of the weak mind of the people and nurtured further by religion. Most of the Hindu mythological stories are based on superstition. Dutta Guru is one such deity invented about just 450 years ago, in Maharashtra. There is a reason for this fantastic invention. In that period of history, saint Nivrittinath and many other saints like him, were trying to awaken people and break the chains of superstition and casteism (among the Marathi people) through their 'Abhang Vani' (hymns). They founded 'Bhagavat Dharma' (a theist but

equalizing sect) and crisscrossed the country right up to the Punjab to spread it. The Marathi mind was the most affected by it and Marathi people almost forgot the caste-based distinction which naturally irritated the orthodox religionists.

They wanted people to believe in the birth-based caste and colour discrimination and inferiority of the fair sex and to treat women and other inferior castes accordingly. Inventing Datta Maharaj who would take care of these needs of the orthodox became a necessity. (In Brahma Puran it is said that Datta Maharaj restored the lost glory of the Vedas, the rituals and Yagnyas. He reorganized and strengthened the 'Chaturvarnya System'). Another such deity namely, Satyanarayan, was invented only 250 years back after the demise of the Peshava rule. The story and the rituals stipulated in it are written purely with the intension of securing the livelihood of the Brahmin community by spreading superstition. Many other observances- Vrata Vaikalya of comparatively modern times are written for appeasing some newly invented deities, Satyamba, Varadalaxmi and Santoshi Mata. The oldest example of this kind is the Manusmriti, which is supposed to have been composed in the year 230 BC, in Maharashtra, during the Satavahan Empire. This 2237 years old tome was written by Hindu luminaries to subdue some of their own brethren and keep them sunk in the swamp of superstition. All these Puranas and mythical stories based on superstition have been legitimized by the Hindu customs and Traditions. They have in a way obliged people to remain superstitious.

After all we, human beings, are superstitious in one way or other. My belief may look to be a superstition to you and vice versa. We do harbour some superstition or other hidden in our unconscious mind which shows up in our behaviour. A cricketer who hits a century in one match may score a duck in the next, if he does not have the same outfit, shoes and bat that he used in the first match. Take any profession. It ought to be ridden with superstition. There are advocates who believe that they may lose the case if they fail to pray god before leaving for the court room from their office. In olden days people used to return midway from office if their path got crossed by a cat. It is considered auspicious for a person, if before setting out for office, a woman with a pitcher full of water crosses him but quite inauspicious if the pitcher is empty!

At present Buvas and Saints are doing a roaring business in Goa. The large number of devotees attending on them, businessmen, industrialists, advocates, doctors, engineers and political leaders bewilder the common man. He too is tempted to resolve his problems not by legitimate means

but by becoming an increasingly superstitious devotee of the Baba. He thinks all the big political leaders and educated men who follow the Baba, have achieved their higher positions because of Baba's blessings. It is there for all of us to see, how families are ruined by blindly following these Babas. There are instances where women are made to worship stripping their clothes; cocks and goats are sacrificed to appease deities; liquor and bread are offered to the Devchar (class of daemons - messengers of the village deity); performing Yadnya; bathing the Baba at the hands of women; keeping women in Baba's company to beget sons; entrusting young girls to the Baba to cure them of possession; hypnotizing women and making them dance in front of the Baba; and accommodating the Baba in one's house for long periods and spending a fortune on providing him with luxurious comforts. These superstitious acts are carried out under the guise of People's welfare. In reality it is very dangerous to the sanity of the society.

This book by Yadnyeshwar Nigale will prove a boon, bringing fresh air to our society which is suffocating in the present superstitious environment. He has studied carefully all that is happening around, analyzed all the incidents logically and scientifically and then described them accurately and truthfully for the enlightenment of all. This effort of his will positively loosen the grip, superstition has on our people. Mr. Nigale is not going to look back. He is determined to traverse the very long and arduous path of eradicating superstition. His efforts will keep us on a righteous path. I wish him all the success for his future endeavours.

Advocate Pandurang Nagendra Nagvekar,
Earstwhile President,
Gomantak Marathi Academy,
Parvari, Goa, Valvai

January 2008

Preface



The Spanish painter Francisco de Goya produced a series of etchings in 1797, the most famous of which he titled: *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* (The Sleep of Reason brings forth Monsters).

In this masterpiece of thought and technique, a writer is asleep at his desk, his head resting in his arms, while behind him are owls, bats, and a gathering storm of other creatures of the night, all menacingly swooping down on him. A perplexed cat looks on. But, soon after this daring caution, Goya panicked and withdrew his etching for fear of the Inquisition whose shadow hovered on Spanish society at that time.

Goya captured the mood of his age, and as Europe and America woke up to reason and science, these two continents moved on from those dark times.

Because of humanity's uneven moulting, however, the story is

different elsewhere, and reason's continued and perilous repose in Africa and Asia is a cause for grave concern. These two continents make up for two thirds of the world's population, but are heavily weighed down by a magical conception of the world, and by dangerous superstitions.

A superstition is simply a wrong belief about something like believing that seeing a widow could bring bad luck.

Untested, and unchallenged, such beliefs can have real and serious consequences: for thousands of years, in India, widows were forced to remain out of sight, and were banished to a miserable life of isolation.

Sporting 'lucky' shirts, writing exams with a 'lucky' pen etc may give a psychological boost, but the fetish can soon cross limits and transform into an obsession with lucky days, lucky dates and lucky numbers.

Changing the spelling of one's name to ensure success, performing rituals for good luck, wearing coloured gem stones for success in business etc could soon become a substitute for real work.

When large groups of people perform rituals to 'promote world peace', it is a warning that those people's faith in their ability to change their lives is declining. Disastrously, it is also an abdication of personal responsibility for one's future: why could they not actually 'do' something concrete and meaningful to increase the peace and happiness in the world for example visit or help an orphanage, take long term steps to educate a few illiterate adults or make sure all the children in their locality go to school instead of being exploited as child labour. All this can be done with the same costs of performing these magical rituals.

In the 54 countries of Africa and in the 52 countries of Asia, it is time to wake up, and to wake reason up!

Superstition rarely confines itself to the personal sphere and is bound to impact public policy, thereby weakening the very foundations of democracy.

Where superstitions are associated with prejudice, the results are horrific: in Africa homosexuals are killed as a danger to society, albinos are hunted for body parts used in witchcraft and women are killed on suspicion of sorcery. In Asia, women are denied their most basic rights, children are sacrificed to uncover hidden treasures, and lives are ruined because of assumptions about rebirth.

Superstition is also the basis of one of the most pernicious systems of social division and discrimination in human history: the caste system

with its graded system of inequality and its 250 million untouchable victims in 13 countries poses the greatest danger ever to human solidarity.

Robert Ingersoll was right when he said that superstition is the child of ignorance and the mother of misery. Blind beliefs demean and dehumanise entire societies, and prevent us from exercising our true human and moral potential.

We know from history and human experience that reason is the antidote to the misery of superstition, and that it can also vanquish bigotry, dogma and prejudice. It also makes us reasonable and hence more peaceful. The way to proceed on this path was spelt out in 1787 by the American statesman Jefferson, a contemporary of Goya: *Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion.*

This is not happening in today's India. Even in this century of space flights and satellite communications, many, including several practising scientists, hold a schizophrenic allegiance to geocentric astrology and flat earth geomancy.

Social progress means that people should align their beliefs and behaviour to new knowledge and understanding of nature and society. By this measure, we are experiencing a serious regress.

It is not enough that India's Constitution enjoins all citizens in its Article 51 (a) (h) to promote the scientific temper as a Fundamental Duty. Public officials who swear to uphold the Constitution are routinely in breach of this exhortation, space scientists perform religious rituals before launching satellites. Is it Science or Shloka that keeps a satellite in orbit?

Blind belief has so dulled our sense of reasoning that we no longer apply common sense in the conduct of our daily lives. We are becoming a laughing stock of the world. A spirited and passionate defence of reason and the scientific method is needed today in our public life.

Is it not time to stop our daily national humiliation of delusion and unpunished deception of the ignorant and the innocent? Is it not time to prove ourselves as deserving of the fruits of modern knowledge?

Is it not time to free ourselves from the tyranny of ignorance?

Teacher, Politician, Scientist, Engineer, Farmer, Student, Parent, Housewife, Citizen! Listen to MN Roy's poetic wisdom when he called Reason the 'Rhythm of the Cosmos'! Heed the admonition of the Roman

emperor Marcus Aurelius who asked in *Meditations*, in AD 180: *Hast thou reason? Why then dost not thou use it?*

Here is one who heeds the call of duty Shri Nigale, with his powerful analysis aided by a gentle and educative pen, does yeoman service to the cause of making Indian society more rational and hence more human. A huge number of charlatans infest Indian society, and by informing us about their back ground and clarifying their methods. Shri Nigale successfully inoculates us against their poison and deception with the aid of knowledge and reason. The Supreme Court of India's judgement which is supposed to support astrology is clarified, and the criminality and avarice of so-called god-men and god-women is exposed. He examines the hollow claims of astrology and demolishes the myths behind astronomical phenomena. In short, a treat awaits those who are keen on spreading the scientific temper and would like an insight into the modus operandi of those who are deceiving innocent people in the name of religion and by making claims of miracles. Shri Nigale's work has a sophisticated approach - it also shows how the fraudulent claims of fraudsters actually demeans the religion and the saints in whose name these claims are being made. While often the work of rationalists appears to be directed against religion, in essence it is the fight of reason against unreason and ignorance.

That Shri Nigale has been leading this battle for a number of years in Goa and it is most appropriate that his articles be made available to a wider section of the Indian public through this English translation which reads like the original text. May this tome receive the attention that it deserves. No, may this tome receive the attention that Indians deserve!

Babu Gogineni,

International Director,

International Humanist and Ethical Union

June 2012

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Has the Idol Aged? Is It a Mockery of Shri Viththal?

This happened in Madgaon; South Goa's cultural centre and educational capital. The hair of the idol in the Viththal Mandir turned grey. The idol appeared to have grown old overnight. The bad omen was promptly connected with the recent accidental death of the temple priest. The rumor spread like wild fire. Everybody, right from the ministers to the lowly clerks, wanted to see the miracle with their own eyes. People gathered in thousands. Not one of them considered the possibility of the hair turning grey because of some whitish liquid or ointment inadvertently stuck to the head of the idol; despite the fact that we all are bound by our constitution to nurture scientific outlook. The next day the temple priest performed the usual ceremonial ablution (pouring water etc.) on the idol, and the sticky white layer of milk and curds of the previous ablution got washed away. The idol when anointed with oil regained its youthful look!

The pity of it all is that, this happened in Madgao, less than a year after the Maharashtra ANS (movement for eradication of superstition) had organized a Yatra (march) for investigation of miracles in this city; the city that has produced a number of eminent persons who raised Goa to its glory. Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, the president of ANS had accompanied the march and had delivered a speech examining and investigating miracles and incidents that appear to be miraculous. He illustrated with examples, how on critically examining the so called miraculous incidents, their scientific causes come into light and the aura of mystery disappears. These incidents then become ordinary facts of life. Sadly, the large crowds that listened to him attentively forgot his message when they gathered to see the grey hair of their favourite deity.

Critical examination destroys the halo around miracles

Although miracles are impossible, everyone seems to be enamoured of the phenomenon. Crowds gather wherever a miracle like incident

takes place. Some shrewd men in the society take advantage of this psyche of the people and utilize it to increase the supposedly inherent majesty and nobility of a place where they have vested interest. Such an incident occurred three years back in Dicholi Borde, in the temple dedicated to Lord Vadeshwar (Shankar). In the courtyard of this temple there is a statue of a horse made of plaster. It has five heads. There is a tiny mound, resembling the Shiva's phallus under the belly of this horse. One fine day, some passersby saw that water was dripping from the horse's belly on the Shiva's phallus below it. It surely was, for them, a miracle- a horse performing 'Abhishek on a Shivalinga'! In a very short while people from all directions crowded over there. To add to the mystery, Mahashivaratra (Shiva's festival) was, coincidentally, just a couple of days ahead. This helped the superstitious people to add two and two and connect the horse's Abhishek to lord Shiva's miracle.

The incident really was one that very commonly occurs. The plaster of horse's body had developed cracks. During the consecration of the horse on certain occasions, water seeped into the belly of the horse through these cracks. The inside of the horse was plastered with wax. But on this day, due to the summer heat, the wax melted and water started dripping through the cracks on to the mound below. The mound consisted of cement and mud. The dripping water shaped the mound into a few Shivalingas. In this incident neither did the horse perform any 'Abhishek' nor were there any Shivalingas below its belly. But the wild imagination of the devotees is equally matched with their utter inability to think- think logically and rationally. They have no need to examine the occurrences. They readily see miracle in any unusual happenstance.

Now with such a social psyche, if the eyes of a deity's idol start watering, it sure is a miracle. Such an incident took place in the Chamundeshwari Temple of the Mysore state, during the British Raj. It wasn't a miracle but a machination of the temple priest. It happened thus: The eyes of the idol started watering all of a sudden. The temple priest promptly brought this to the notice of the Maharaja. He instructed, Sir Mirza Ismail, the Divan of the state, to investigate into the matter. He in turn sent one investigating officer to the temple, who minutely examined the idol and its surroundings. This revealed that the crown placed on the head of the idol was hollow and connected through tube to the indentations in the eyes of the idol by the side of the nose. The wax on the indentations was scratched out. So, when the crown was filled with water it oozed out of the idol's eyes- the sacred tears of the deity. Why did the priest indulge in this machination? The priestly class did not approve of a

Muslim becoming their Divan. But the Maharaja could neither be intimidated nor fooled. Both the miracle and the temple priest were exposed.

More sensational than the above was the news that the image of Jesus Christ was shedding tears of blood. This happened quite recently, just six months back, in the house of Mascharhenus a resident of Kamurli Village, in Sasashti Taluka. The news, as usual, spread like wild fire. Devotees-both educated and uneducated, from all around gathered into Kamurli to see the miracle with their own eyes. But none of them thought over whether it is possible that the reddish tears really contain blood. In fact, Christianity does not approve of performing miracles. Jesus Christ himself denounced performing miracles. He correctly maintained that belief in miracles misleads people and hides the truth from them. Despite this teaching of Jesus Christ, the Catholic nations of Europe are replete with idols of weeping Madonna. Tears flowing from the eyes of an idol are no more a miracle there. Everybody there knows that idols of plaster, being porous, can easily be made to shed tears. Adding some chemicals the tears become bloody!

Vision of a Trident- a psychological 'miracle'

The most controversial Tantrik (versed in the Tantras-charms, rites, precepts), Chadraswami, in order to enhance his phony self imposed nobility, concocted the miracle of 'drinking milk by Ganesh idols'. Dr. Yashpal and Dr. Jayant Narlikar immediately explained the physical causes of this incredible phenomenon that was given enough publicity by the media. And yet, there are quite a few individuals who believed that the idols drank only that milk offered by pious men only and not any others. But the fact, as explained by the two eminent scientists, is that 'sipping of milk by the Ganesh Idol' is not at all a miracle. It is caused by two scientific processes happening simultaneously. They are 'Capillary action' and 'Surface Tension'. A simple experiment can explain these processes. If you keep a corner of a blotting paper dipped into the ink bottle, the ink absorbed by the blotting paper rises up against the gravitational force. Any groove or scratch resembling a capillary can cause Capillary action. So the idols do not 'drink milk'; the milk is simply absorbed. Moreover not only the Ganesh Idol but any idol for that matter can exhibit this property and 'absorb' milk or any liquid (beer or rum for example) offered by both pious and impious men and women, on any day and at any time; because the natural laws are universal. There is no miraculous or supernatural power involved in it.

Last year, a rumor of another miracle spread that 'marks of the letter Om and trident' in red colour are seen on Shivalingas. Devotees in huge queues gathered in all Shiva temples. It was only a rumor. Some devotee of Shiva might have seen such marks on the Shivalinga. Of course the question remains; why should Shiva's devotee happen to see such marks? The science of Hypnotism has an answer to this question. A devotee can go into a hypnotic state because of the combined effect of his intense devotion towards god; his earnest longing for meeting his god and his getting engrossed in Bhajan, Poojan, and Kirtan. He is self hypnotized and feels that he has met with his god. A devotee whose 'mind's eye' sees a Shivaling with the marks of Om and Trishul (trident) in red on it, and worships that Shivalinga with all concentration will get self hypnotized and actually see the Om and trishul marks. For him the marks are real and right there. He reveals this 'reality' to fellow devotees. The possibility of their seeing such marks is meager but they too want to be ahead in the race for devotion and may pretend to have seen the marks. Such is the root of rumor.

If a stone idol starts sweating, should it not be considered a miracle? Such a miracle did take place in the Jain Mandir situated in Dhule city, about four years back. A rumor spread that the three huge idols of Shreyasnath, Sheetalnath and Kunthunath in that temple have started sweating. Thousands of devotees flocked to the temple. The crowd became unmanageable. A mild Lathi charge was called for to stop the hooligans from taking advantage of the painful jamming. The simple question-as to how can a stone idol sweat, did not strike any devotee. Finally journalist took the initiative and with the help of a geologist explained the so called miracle.

These idols are carved out of basalt rock. The unique atmosphere created by the stone structure of the temple caused dampness on the idols. This was the combined result of three factors- the high temperature outside the temple, the comparatively much cooler atmosphere in the sanctum sanctorum and the moist air of the temple. As the dampness on the idols increased, it condensed into water and trickled down the idols. This was an atmospheric process. But for the gullible devotees it was a miracle.

This same mentality was revealed in the episode of 'Viththal's hair turning grey' with which we began. The people mortgaged their ability to reason and connected the graying of deity's hair with his aging. Isn't this an inadvertent mockery of the deity 'Srhi Viththal'? Once you assume that the god has become old, the next step automatically leads to his

demise. The concept of God is a pious and a noble concept. The God in this concept is ever young and immortal, completely free from old age and death. But regretfully our reasoning ability has freezed and rusted because of complete lack of use!

25 Mar, 2003



The Necessity of Atheism

If he is infinitely good, what reason should we have to fear him?

If he is infinitely wise, why should we have doubts concerning our future?

If he knows all, why warn him of our needs and fatigue him with our prayers?

If he is everywhere, why erect temples to him?

If he is just, why fear that he will punish the creatures that he has filled with weaknesses?

If grace does everything for them, what reason would he have for recompensing them?

If he is all-powerful, how offend him, how resist him?

If he is reasonable, how can he be angry at the blind, to whom he has given the liberty of being unreasonable?

If he is immovable, by what right do we pretend to make him change his decrees?

If he is inconceivable, why occupy ourselves with him?

If he has spoken, why is the universe not convinced?

If the knowledge of God is the most necessary, why is it not the most evident and the clearest?

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

The Sati Practice - Religious Luminaries' Scheming

Our religious luminaries (all males) had questioned Lord Bentinck's authority to dabble with their cherished practice of Sati. Yet the British did outlaw the inhuman practice. But now that the British have left and we have gained the freedom to practice our own religion, our religious leading lights are reviving this practice. This is what happened, recently, in Madhya Pradesh, in a village named Tamoli. A 65 year old woman was forced to climb up the fiercely blazing pyre of her dead husband. Thousands of people had gathered to witness the spectacle! This practice, as said earlier was banned long ago during the British Raj. The police who tried to stop the atrocious act were mobbed by the spectators and driven away. The same old argument that was proffered at the time of Bentinck, in the Allahabad High Court, is put forward today; 'who are you to stop the woman from committing Sati? To decide whether to commit Sati is the right of our pious religious faith.' Our Pundits accused Lord Bentinck of interfering with their religious practices. Today the mobs are impatient with law; they simply hooted out the police who came to defend the law and protect life. This means that how so ever cruel the Sati Practice might be, it has the sanction of our religious code. Does the Hindu religious law really support such a cruel practice? It needs to be investigated with total disregard for human rights.

Remarriage (of widows) was approved of in the Vedic period.

The tenets of a pious religious system are founded in ethical values. It is impossible that the inhuman and cruel custom like Sati is sanctioned by a religious system. Let us, therefore trace, in what period and how did this cruel custom come into existence. There are sufficient grounds to believe that this custom is the result of the insecurity felt by the widowed women in the past. The Hindu Pundits claim that the woman who burns herself alive with the dead body of her husband on the pyre is considered most virtuous and pious by the Hindu religion; but the fact is that in the

Vedic Religion that is the mainspring of the Hindu religion, there is no mention of any sanction given to any woman to so burn herself.

Once upon a time, in the Ida Germanic society it was customary for a wife to die with her husband. Thus it was expected that she would remain in her husband's company even after his death. In the Atharva Veda it is mentioned that in the times immemorial it was considered a woman's religious obligation to commit Sati after her husband's death. However our religion is flexible and adapts to the needs of the times. So the notions of ethics too changed in the later Vedic period and widow remarriage was accepted as a matter of course. It had also received religious recognition. Rigved depicts a scene where a woman gets ready to burn herself on the pyre of her husband. A young man ready to marry her brings her down from the pyre and says, 'Oh woman, get up and enter the world of the living again. I am your husband now and hold your hand. Come with me; we are husband and wife now.' This shows that in the Rigvedic period, widow remarriage had become a common practice and women were treated with dignity. However soon after this period, a woman's dignified position began deteriorating as the male chauvinism increased. It looks as though they were determined to obliterate all symbols of women's dignity of the Vedic period. Later in the period when the Smritis were compiled, woman's dignity was completely ravaged. During this period of male domination and commencing of the Chaturvarnya system (division of the society into four classes) Shoodras and women were treated with utter contempt and woman became an object to be used and enjoyed. To instill the theory of 'male domination' in the society, the intellectuals nurtured by the Vedic-Aryan tradition instituted the custom of child marriage and polygamy. The custom of ill treating widows started in this period. The inhuman tradition of Sati too must have been introduced deliberately in this period.

Unabashed Forgery in the Rigvedic Richa (hymn)

The established religious luminaries of those days employed an ingenious stratagem of providing the newly established sati tradition with sanction from religious scripture. So they changed the word 'Agre' (meaning forward) to 'Agne' (meaning into the fire). The meaning of this relevant Richa which entreated the widow to march ahead (i.e. away from the pyre) was turned upside down, entreating her to enter the fire. The theologians of the day thus got a powerful instrument, sanctioned by religion, to kill a woman who was already stripped of all dignity and reduced to an inert, insensible object. This was the beginning of the heartrending tragedy of the fare sex.

'Vedavakya'-the word of the Vedas has a compelling validity for the Indian society. The subterfuge Richa deployed to push the widow into the fire instead of leading her away from it became a religious obligation and pushing the widow into fire became the pious duty for the orthodox religionists. The will of the widow had no significance in this entire affair. Gradually fulfilling the religious obligation was made almost mandatory and thousands of innocent widows were burnt alive. How cruel can man become! In the name of the pious Vedic Religion Humanity itself was reduced to ashes. The cold-blooded Sati practice caused enormous turmoil in the country. In Bengal alone in the year 1815, 378 women were burnt alive; in 1817 the figure rose to 706; while in 1818, the religious watchdogs earned plenty of religious merit by shoving 839 widows on to the pyres of their husbands. These are the recorded data. Hundreds of unrecorded instances of Sati must have occurred. The helpless women who tried to get off the burning pyre were pushed back into it using long bamboos. Many Indian and foreign scholars have described this unspeakable cruelty in their writings. Hue En Tsang, Alberuni, Petro De la Val, Tavernier, Bernier, Manuchi, Abe Dubva and others, in their travelogues, have described the heartrending instances of the widows being burnt alive.

Sly Politics, Self-seeking Economics

Many politicians have used the practice of Sati to advance their own political interests; while in Bengal the land owners used it to enhance their own economic condition. These incidents are the nadir of inhumanity. Ramdevray was the King of Devgiri. When he died Shankardev ascended the throne. In order not to have any rival to his throne, Shankardev compelled Ramadev's widow, the queen Kamaais to commit Sati. When the queen was shoved on to the pyre against her wish, she loudly cursed Shankardev, 'Chamunda will kill you at the hands of someone and becoming childless the dynasty will soon extinguish.' Another incident of political use of Sati: Balaji Bajirao Peshva, compelled queen Sakvarbai, the widow of Shahu Maharaj to commit Sati by bringing pressure on her from her parents' Shirke family, because he wanted to install a king of his own choice on the throne.

In the olden days, in Bengal, because of the 'Daybhag' custom, widows were entitled to a share of the family property. But if the widow is made to commit Sati, the interested next of kin will be able to claim her share and also attain some pious merit. It had become customary for such religious men to amass wealth by shoving the widows into the burning pyre. In a similar case, a widow, being unable to bear the heat, tried to get

out of the pyre, was shoved back into it with bamboos by the attending Brahmins. With unbearable pain she cried allowed, 'Dewarji' and breathed her last! The heart of the affectionate Dewarji, i.e. her young brother in law melted. But he was helpless. The young brother in law- Raja Ram Mohan Rai, for the whole of his life, bemoaned his helplessness to save his beloved sister in law. This heartrending incident impressed his mind so deeply that he openly defied all the orthodox religious community and compelled the British rulers to ban the Sati custom by law. Thus he rescued many would be Satis from the inhuman custom.

Much before Raja Ram Mohan Rai, the Mogul Emperor Jahangir opposed the Sati custom. Emperor Akbar is said to have stopped one Sati, from the Jaipur dynasty, being burnt alive. During the Portuguese time, Aphos de Albuquerque had banned the Sati custom. However as soon as he returned to Portugal, because of the influence of the religious luminaries cases of Sati began occurring. The unabashed forgery made by the religionists literally sent thousands of widows to their firry death. When this came to the notice of General de Konstantiv de Braganza, he ordered that the old ban on Sati custom be strictly implemented. Sati Custom was a very cruel custom and destructive of the society. But there are many more such customs still prevailing in the society; they are exploitative and unjust to the poor people. It is high time that the chiefs of the Dharmapith- seats of religion- come together in a conference and rethink about these exploitative religious commands.

25 Mar, 2003



Blood Stained Tears; Or Mocking at Jesus Christ?

Dr. Jayant Naralika had delivered his speech in the Godrej Memorial Lecture Series. It was nearly five years back. He referred to the then recent incident when the Ganesh Idols everywhere had supposedly started drinking milk offered by their devotees, and said, 'while watching how the Ganesh idol drinks milk, our compatriots could have easily understood the commonly occurring phenomenon called 'surface tension' in science. Unfortunately they failed to do that. They looked at it as a manifestation of the miraculous supernatural power. This is the height of superstition. Adopting a scientific outlook towards all that surrounds us is the only alternative if we want to eradicate this deep rooted superstition from the social mind.' I am reminded of these words of Dr. Narlikar, because a similar miraculous incident has recently occurred in south Goa, where Jesus Christ, in a picture, started shedding bloodstained tears.

This picture belonged to Mr. Mascarenhas, a resident of the Ambora-Kamurli village. The news of the blood stained tears spread like wild fire and crowds of devotees hastened to reach Kamurli to see the miracle with their own eyes. In the mean time the priest of the local church, Father Lopez shifted the picture into the church building. Devotees patiently waited outside the building in big Queues. Five years back the devotees of Ganesh never bothered to verify whether the Ganesh Idols were really drinking milk. Here too the faithful displayed the same indifferent attitude. All of them firmly believed that the pious tears were that of Lord Jesus and they should not miss the opportunity of seeing them and doing their pious duty. The only consolation was that the spokesman of the bishop refrained from declaring the incident to be a miracle. Of course, the Church did not categorically deny the possibility of a miracle. The spokesman declared that since the incident is being thoroughly investigated it wasn't appropriate to comment it right then.

Father Lopez added significantly, 'It is difficult to tell when the report of the committee, investigating such religious incident, will be received; we might have to wait for even several years.' That tells it all. Actually any liquid containing even a little bit of blood can be investigated in a forensic laboratory in a very short time. Looking at the Bishop's remark in the light of this fact, one can imagine what sort of report the religious investigation into the blood stained tears will eventually produce.

Miracles are Not Consistent with the Christian Religion

Miracles are inconsistent with Christianity; Jesus Christ himself did not approve of miracles. He rightly discerned that belief in miracles misleads people who then ignore the truth. So the most merciful Jesus had severely warned his disciples never to indulge in miracle mongering. Despite this warning, the Catholic countries are replete with the miraculous statues of Virgin Mary shedding tears, to attract people. In 1953 at Syracuse in Italy, a statue of Madonna in plaster was made. It was installed in a specially built mausoleum. Thousands of people are attracted there to see the tears shed by the statue even today. In 1980, on a hill in Nisima a statue of Mary was erected. Blood stained tears trickled down the cheeks of this statue. Naturally this was a great attraction for the common people. But the Bishop, Alfred Garcia did not approve of such miracles and refused permission to its religious inauguration. An artist cum a professional pleader, from a town called Maropati, in Italy, painted a very colourful Madonna in 1971. A blood like liquid oozed out from this picture for a long time.

One more case of bloody tears: Sivitavechi is a harbour, 50 miles north of Rome. A very religious man, Gregory by name, lived in a nearby village. He bought a plaster statue of Madonna from a Preacher. This statue he placed in his garden in a tomb. After a couple of months when Gregory was strolling in his garden, he noticed that the left eye of the statue was shedding blood stained tears. Devotees immediately queued up near his house to have a glimpse of the statue.

In France, there is a grand church in Mirebeau Poitou where on one of its walls a multi coloured portrait of Jesus Christ is hung. From one of the eyebrows of Jesus in this picture, drops of blood trickled. It continued for four years from 1911 to 1915. When a sample of this blood was examined in the Leicester Institute of London, it was revealed to be human blood of a very rare blood group. A few years back, in the town of Masmechelen, in Belgium, a statue of Madonna was erected. A similar statue was erected in Brookline, a suburb of New York. Both these

statues of plaster were made by the same sculptor. Soon tears started trickling from the eyes of both these statues which were captured in photos and published in news papers. Some researchers now became curious and started investigating into it. In fact trickling or tears from Madonna's statues or blood from her pictures has been an issue of investigation with many researchers for a number of years.

In the year 1995, a scientist in Chemistry department of Pavia University, discovered the truth behind the blood stained tears. The scientist, Dr. Louise Garlasheli wrote an article, "Chemistry in Britain" on his investigation. This was published in a prestigious magazine. In this article he explained in details how tears flow from the eyes of statues and blood from the eyes in the pictures. The truth behind the so called miracles was exposed. The gist of this article follows:

The magic of tears from pictures is chemical reaction of the colours

"... making a statue with tears or blood trickling eyes is not a manifestation of miraculous power or god's power. Anyone can make a statue of this kind. All that you need for it is plaster or China clay because it is porous. This is all the truth behind it. The statues need to be thinly coated with a liquid that does not allow another liquid like water to seep through it. Through a hole in its head, the statue should be filled with water. The water will be trapped inside the statue because of the impermeable layer on it. But if the layer on the indentation in the corners of the eyes is scratched out the porousness of that part is activated water will start trickling from there. This will fool the spectator in believing that the statue is crying. With a little salt added to the water filled in the statue, the trickling tears will almost be the same as the human tears. Now fill the statue with some red liquid and the trickling tears will look like blood to the spectator. Normal human tears or bloody tears will keep trickling as long as there is water or red coloured liquid in the statue."

Dr. Garlasheli did not stop at the publication of his research. He decided to investigate directly as many statues of Madonna as possible. He thought it necessary to reveal the secret of the oozing liquid from the eyes of the statues. The statue of Madonna in Syracuse, Italy, was much renowned for its copious tears. Devotees visited this statue in ever larger crowds. So Dr. Garlasheli turned to this statue in Syracuse. He informed the objective of his investigation to the officers in charge of safeguarding the statue. He was refused permission, quite likely because of his objective. But the inquisitive scientist did not accept defeat. He contacted the sculptor who had made that particular statue and asked him

to make an exact replica of it. On minute examination of the statue, the learned scientist discovered a few things. The statue was made out of plaster; behind its face there was some empty space that was not easily noticeable. This much was more than enough for him to arrive at his conclusion which was quite revealing. The mystery of the weeping Madonnas was unveiled. Everyone came to know the secret of Madonna's weeping or shedding bloody tears.

Comparatively recently, in 1987, Dr. Shawn Carlson, of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories of California, held a public demonstration. The Mona Lisa that Dr. Shawn Carlson had painted was literally crying. The audience was stunned. Dr. Shawn Carlson promptly offered the explanation, 'my friends, it is true that Mona Lisa in my painting is crying; but there is no reason to be astonished. There is nothing bizarre or mystifying in it. This is the alchemy of chemicals mixed with the colours.'

The moral of the story is: The mysterious phenomena of trickling of tears or blood from the statues of Madonna or Christ and the weeping of Mona Lisa's painting are nothing but manifestations of chemical or physical processes.

The blood stained tears dripping from the picture of Christ, the incident that occurred in Kamurli in South Goa is one link of the above chain. It tells us how important it is to be alert regarding such deceptive happenings and keep our discerning ability sharp and moreover use it judiciously. But by and large people seem to be reluctant to think and reason and readily believe any seemingly miraculous happening as manifestation of supernatural power. The same mindset was responsible for accepting the drinking of milk by the Ganesh idols as a miracle. So many of us believed in the miracle and made a laughing stock of ourselves before the world.

In Kamurli, as blood like tears dripped from the eyes in the picture of Christ we believed it was a miracle and crowded there to see the miracle. With such behavior we totally negate the most valuable principle preached to us by the most compassionate and merciful Jesus Christ, who said, 'do not believe in miracles because miracles do not happen.' This mindset must be changed. The sooner we change this mindset into a scientific outlook, the better will it be for us all.

25 Mar, 2003



Awakening Kundalini: Deriding Saint Dnyaneshwar

Kashinath Borkar, a resident of Kurti (Fonda), wrote a letter to draw attention to the serious goings-on in the name of 'awakening Kundalini' in many towns of Goa. He said in his letter, 'a well established 'Mataji' has invented a technique of 'Sahaj yog' (an easy way of awakening Kundalini). Her disciples are luring the gullible devout people in accepting this fad of Sahaj yog, not sparing even children.' Expressing his anxiety Borkar adds, 'Mataji's heralds claim that they will awaken the Kundalini energy of the devotees and the vibrations caused as a result, will give them peace of mind.' He does not hesitate to pronounce, 'these bogus goings-on are nothing but duping innocent people.' Swindling ignorant people in the name of spirituality has become a common menace; but all of us generally tend to ignore it. Instead of cautioning the devotees, we think, 'it's none of my businesses' and turn a blind eye to it. Against this background, Mr. Kashinath Borkar, a true responsible and concerned citizen, made a laudable attempt to publicly expose the 'Kundalini Awakening' fraud. He certainly deserves to be commended for showing such courage.

The self styled spiritual sects, these days, are playing havoc in Goa. They, it seems, are out to malign the spiritual heritage of India. The perpetrators of 'Kundalini awaking' fad are of the same kind and in the same business of deceiving the gullible devotees. Around two years back, the disciples of a well established 'Mataji' started organizing programmes of 'mass awakening of Kundalini energy' at several places in Goa. One such Programme was arranged at Tivare (Mashel). Some activists of the Goa Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti attended this programme in order to find out the real nature of the process. The group of activists attending the programme included some lawyers and teachers.

To begin with, the disciples called upon the audience to 'think of

Mataji' and then told them to move their hands in some specific way. This done, they asked suggestively, 'feel your palms, aren't they cooler now?' adding, 'this is the sign that your Kundalini energy is awakened.' The disciples further promised, 'If you meditate in this fashion every day and awaken your Kundalini, you will not only be free of all your worries but also be free of diabetes and will never develop any cancerous growth. To achieve all this you should earn the blessings of our Mataji. So keep meditating on Mataji.' After this the audience was invited to ask questions in case they had any doubt.

A teacher-an ANS activist- from the audience asked, 'the Goans as also the people of this town are blessed by the Goddess Shantadurga in whom the people firmly believe. But here you are asking them to believe in Mataji. Is your Mataji superior to or preeminent than the deity Shri Shantadurga?' Mataji's campaigners, as expected, could not give a satisfactory answer. Another activist shot another question, 'you claim that awakening Kundalini can cure a person of incurable ailments; can you provide any scientific evidence to prove it?' This question also remained unanswered. The next question shot by the ANS activist exposed the ignorance of the disciples of Mataji regarding Saint Dnyaneshwar's exposition on Kundalini. The exasperated chief Mataji advocate then announced that such 'brain teasing' questions should not be asked. As the ANS activists objected to this demand, Mataji's disciples immediately started winding up their programme. One lady, a self styled Doctor among Mataji's advocates, said menacingly, 'raising doubts in this fashion is not a good thing. You will be punished for that and in less than ten years period, you will have to humbly implore our Mataji and plead for her pardon.' In other words she cursed the activists.

After all, what is this Kundalini, the mass awakening of which the devotees of Mataji seem to have a monopoly? Kundalini is conceived in the Yogashastra as Shakti (energy or power) in the form of a coil. In this form it is distinct from Shiva. When this coil is straightened it becomes one with Shiva. This is possible only by great effort and arduous penance. The Shakti has two forms 'chit' which is not distinguished from the Atma and the 'Achit' which illuminates all the universes i.e. all the illusory world and is called Kundalini. It's a very complicated discipline of Yogashastra and different people have different conjectures and inferences about its positions, parts and their functions. The theory behind this concept is that the human body is a miniature of the Brahmanda (universe). As the Vilas (dalliance) of Brahma and Brahmashakti manifests itself in the Universe, so does it in the human

body too. Again as it happens in the Brahmand, in the Pinda (human body) too, when the shield loosens, the Pinda can establish contact with any Loka (world). Another point in the human body called 'Sahasrara Chakra' is conceived to be in the head. By raising Kundalini to this point it unites with Shiva. This becomes possible with very arduous Yogasadhana which many great Yoga Gurus were not able to achieve. Yoga Vidya is a very profound and intense discipline. And a Yogi requires to study and practice Yogashastra systematically, devoting his entire life to the awakening of the Kundalini. In the chapter on 'Atma Sanyama Yoga' in the Bhagvadgeeta one gets guidance for it. In Dnyaneshvari, in the chapter of Dhyanyoga (Yogic meditation) guidance regarding it is available. (It is, however, not possible to elaborate on any of these references here.)

Santa Dnyaneshwar describes what happens when a person's Kundalini Shakti is awakened. He says, 'the body becomes lustrous and looks as though luster personified is seated there. Such a body scares the very god of death-the Yama. The signs of aging recede from the body, so much so that even the youthfulness ebbs away and the body regain a child like appearance. The person looks like a child, but in reality is capable of mighty brave deeds and is extremely courageous. He grows new nails that shine like jewels. He develops a fresh set of teeth which shine like rows of diamonds. His palms and soles are as red as the lotus flower and his eyes become crystal clear. His sight reaches beyond the sky. The whole body glitters like gold but is insubstantial like air. ...'

The weak sighted claimers of Kundalini awakening!

Yogiraj Dnyaneshwar further says, 'Such a man (with an awakened Kundalini) can see beyond the sea, can come to know the plans and schemes occurring in the heaven, and can detect the feelings in the ant's mind too; he rides on a wind-horse, walks on water without waiting his feet...' In short he obtains many superhuman powers. Keeping aside Dnyaneshwar's poetic and colourful portrayal of a Yogi who has succeeded in awakening his Kundalini, the gist of the entire discussion is: awakening Kundalini is not at all Sahaj-neither innate nor easily or casually achieved as claimed by Mataji's canvassers. It is a very arduous task and requires frightfully enormous penance and austerity which only an ascetic, thoroughly versed in Yogavidya is capable of. Claiming that one can achieve it, by a short cut-just by meditating on Mataji is nothing but deriding the great Saint Dnyaneshwar. We can't afford to turn a blind eye to this fact.

Misleading people in the name of so called Adhyatma (spirituality) by holding prayer meetings (Satsang), giving sermons and organizing big congregations has become a lucrative business of many so called spiritual sects led by men and women, calling themselves Ma, Mata, Devi, Swami, Maharaj, Parampoojya (most revered) or some such soubriquet. They have well developed and extremely effective techniques of drugging the helpless, terrified, miserable minds with their talk of spirituality. To begin with, they talk of virtuous ways of living and refer, now and then, to the literary compositions of the saints. Once the audience is magnetized they begin to use the technique of idolatry, injecting the venom of superstitions in the minds of their audience telling stories of supernatural deeds of their Mataji or Buva. The hypnotized public then develops a sense of reverence and dignity towards the Buva or Mataji. Finally they develop absolute faith in the Buva or Mataji. The crowds of gullible devotees attracted towards the unknown and the mysterious, women for whom life has become unbearable and the curious young boys and girls are fascinated and ensnared by the Buvas and Matajis and finally get cheated. The Kundalini awakeners' sect is no exception to this general trend of Buvabaji.

The simple, straightforward Goans worship Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram like deities. They read Dnyaneshwari and Gatha again and again. They should ask the Kundalini awakeners if they have been successful in awakening their own Kundalini. Are they able to see Brazil or Canada beyond the sea? Can they see the rivers and mountains in America? Can they converse with an ant? Have they developed any supernatural powers? Can they walk on water without dampening their feet? So on and so forth. None of them can answer these questions, for, they too are ordinary men and women like all of us and do not have any supernatural powers. The phrase 'Awakening of Kundalini' is just a verbal support which will vanish when confronted with such a tirade of questions and expose their real character.

11 Feb, 2004



Animal Sacrifice: Pandering Taste Buds

Yadnya Sanskriti (culture) was known for its animal sacrifice. Many animals including the sacred cows were sacrificed during Yagnyas. In the two principal Yagnyas, the Ashvamedha and the ones on the new and full moon days, it is said, 609 different animals were tied to 21 sacrificial posts. In Yajurveda even a man sacrifice is mentioned. The flesh of the animals was naturally eaten as the sacred offering blessed by the gods. The Brahmins, of course, had the lion's share of the meat. Human beings have developed such irresistible taste for meat that even after Buddha's and Mahavir's teachings of non-violence towards the animals, people cannot do without meat.

The same age old practice of sacrificing animals in the name of religious rites or vows to deities is still in practice. In rural India people gather in the fairs in honour of a deity on certain days. Animal sacrifice is part of the ritual of worship of the deity in the village where the fair takes place. Cocks and goats are sacrificed in large numbers, including at times even a he-buffalo. The meat is distributed among the devotees as the deity's blessings. It is eaten with equal veneration for the deity. In fact no deity asks any of its devotees for offerings of blood and flesh of animals. But we conveniently believe that the deity can be appeased by sacrificing some animal and resort to some readily available legendary stories to justify our cruel violence. The gist of these Puranic Stories - legends traditionally believed by the people from the surroundings- is the same; 'Sacrifice a goat or a buffalo in front of me. I shall not be appeased otherwise; so said the deity to someone in his dream.'

A god or goddess blesses all creatures; not just the devotees. Since the animals and birds are his or her creations every creature should get protection under them. Granting this, no god or goddess will ask us to sacrifice one of its own creations. It is not because the deity asks for the sacrifice but because the human beings cannot resist their appetite for

meet. So when we sacrifice an animal, we forget all our compassion and sympathy. We are blinded by our desire for meat and can't even notice the pitiful look in the eyes of the sacrificial animal. Their silent lamentation does not touch our heart. We boast to be members of a cultured civilization and yet conveniently forget that we have no moral right to kill any dumb animals. We routinely read literature that our saints have left for us; but never reflect on it. We are more interested in indulging our taste buds.

Through their literature the saints proscribe the violence committed against animals in the name of deities and point out the worthlessness of rituals.

*Fire sacrifices are a plenty; so is the destruction
Of Shami and Peepul trees.
Kill a goat tying his mouth
And perform the sacred Somyag!*

Sant Ekanath thus condemns felling of trees and killing of animals. He attacks the violent practice of actually killing a he-buffalo and says

*The eternal goddess Bhavani,
Devoid of attributes,
Manifests herself for the task of
Defeating the Buffalo-Daemon
Which in fact is the insatiable crave in us.*

He tells us very emphatically, not to kill the living flesh and blood buffalo but to conquer the daemon of craving lurking in our mind. In his short Stanzas, popularly called the Bharud, he tells us:

*As they use the stuff
Like lime coconuts and frankincense,
Likewise they kill
Insensitively, cocks and goats
With no remorse.*

Thus he chastises us for our violence towards the animals. He preaches further: God is the supreme ruler of this world. So we should worship him and should not appease any ghosts, devils or fiends by sacrificing animals. He ridicules the prevalent silly practices of worship:

*Worship an idol in a warrior's dress
Or the spirit of a Muslim dead,
An idiot with horns, a fiend's fetters*

*Or a stone smeared with red lead
And sacrifice dumb animals
Like sheep and goat to them.*

Our saints tell us, none of us can overcome his craving (and least of all, his craving for tasty food). Then one starts appeasing petty deities by various ways of arduous worship. Sant Tukaram points out the worthlessness of all these ways:

*No Jakhai-Jokhai or Mayarani Mesabai and Randichandi exist,
Worshipping these female fiends is getting liqueur and meat;
Bahirav Khanderav are deities
Invented to get free meals;
Potbellied huge Ganesh means
Lots of Laddus Modaks and jilebis.
Munja and Mhaishasur are worshipers'
Own own daughter and son;
Vetale-Phetale, may their faces be black burn;
Tuka says forget all of them
And worship Rakhumai's husband
Wholeheartedly.*

The message of these saints is, 'Such irascible ways of worship is meant for irascible people. What we need is to get rid of our Tamoguna-the dark side of our mentality and increase our virtuousness. Tukaram, as long ago as 350 years, had preached people to treat all trees and animals as their own relatives. He had said, 'trees and creepers and also all the creatures of the forest are for me, no less than my relations.' The Social Reformer, Sant Gadge Baba used sermons as a powerful means of enlightening the common people against animal sacrifice. He used to chat with his audience asking interesting questions. The question-answer session would proceed thus:

Baba: Don't you vow before the deity?

Audience: Yes, we do.

Baba: Don't you tell him, 'my child is sick, help him recover; I will sacrifice a goat'?

Audience: yes, we do.

Baba: Don't you say, 'I will offer you a four legged one (animal) but spare this two legged one (child) of mine'?

Audience: Yes, we tell him so.

Baba: Why my friends? Why do you say so? Does he find the two legged one bitter to test? Is that god of yours who made this whole world, so very covetous? Is he so corrupt as to expect bribe from you?

What sort of god is he; who takes the life of a goat?

The butcher stands there with his large knife, the lamb bleats pitifully. But you are not concerned. You drag it in front of the deity and knock him down on the floor. Then you wring its neck; the butcher cuts it with his knife; blood flows all over. ..Next you skin the lamb, cut it into pieces, cook it and then all of you enjoy it cajoling each other to eat more. You silly people, you kill the poor lamb- god's creature and expect him to do what you want? No, you will never be contented.

Hearing this, the audience starts weeping. 'Pardon us, Baba, we made a mistake; we will never do that again', they all vow in chorus. Gadage Baba is no more with us; but he will be remembered for ever. We all need to vow en mass like Baba's audience, as a tribute to his memory, 'we shall not kill'.

15 Sept, 2004



Atheism.....

Agnosticism is a perfectly respectable and tenable philosophical position; it is not dogmatic and makes no pronouncements about the ultimate truths of the universe. It remains open to evidence and persuasion; lacking faith, it nevertheless does not deride faith. Atheism, on the other hand, is as unyielding and dogmatic about religious belief as true believers are about heathens. It tries to use reason to demolish a structure that is not built upon reason.

SYDNEY J. HARRIS

All religions, with their gods, their demi-gods, and their prophets, their messiahs and their saints, were created by the prejudiced fancy of men who had not attained the full development and full possession of their faculties.

MIKHAIL BAKUNIN

It is the absolutism of theism, its pernicious influence upon humanity, its paralyzing effect upon thought and action, which Atheism is fighting with all its power.

EMMA GOLDMAN

Beware! Aasarambapu Storms In!

My fellow Goans, watch out! A spiritual cyclone is rushing towards Goa and will soon arrive here. The cyclone, named Aasarambapu, however, has developed in Gujarat, not in the Arabian Sea or Bay of Bengal. Aasarambapu (Bapuji hereafter) is a very big shot in the field of spirituality, well established in Gujarat and Mumbai. He has spread his spiritual tentacles in Goa too. And now he is arriving in Goa in person. The specialty of this spiritual Guru is that he administers Saraswati Mantra to students.

Recently, in Panaji, devotees of Bapuji held a meeting and decided to invite Bapuji for holding Satsang meetings and sermons. Shri Ashok Bhatt from Mangalore, a leading devotee of Bapuji's sect guided the attendants. In his address he said, 'Let us fix up a date for Bapuji's arrival here. For his Satsang (sort of mass prayer meetings), thousands of devotees from Karwar, Hubali, Belagao, Kolhapur, etc. will come here. It is necessary to provide all facilities for the one and a half lack devotees. Fortunately many high ranking officers in the administration have agreed to co-operate with us.'

Bhatt sahib further added, 'At the end of Satsang Bapuji administers Saraswati Mantra to students. It is in the students' interest to be consecrated thus at Bapuji's hands. So we must see that students attend the Satsang meetings in large numbers.' He explained in details how to organize the whole show and the different services that will have to be provided. In the end, he suggested, 'As a mark of gratitude, we will offer Bapuji a Thaili (small bag) of 18 to 20 lack upees. As soon as the date of Bapuji's arrival is confirmed we can make an announcement regarding the Thaili to be offered. The devotees will donate generously and everything will go off as planned without any hitch. Experience tells us that all the devotees who attend Bapuji's Satsang are bound to make all-round progress in life.' So the spiritual storm of Bapuji has set in the

direction of Goa and will arrive here soon.

Generally all devotees tend to be greatly influenced by the magnetizing personality of their Maharaj and after listening to his sermon they feel satisfied as though they have achieved the object of their lives. Goans too are no exception to this tendency. A Goan too feels compelled to attend a sermon because a large crowd attends it. But like any other Indian citizen he does not bother much about what he is told in the name of spirituality by the Maharaj. This is an old habit of ours, despite the fact that nature has bestowed on us the ability to reason and discern what is true and what is false. Let us now use this precious ability and examine what Aasarambapu says in his Satsang and sermon.

What kind of Spirituality is this?

Bapuji's sermons which reveal his brand of spirituality are available in the form of booklets everywhere. They are quite cheap. In his booklet 'Mahan Nari' (great woman), Bapuji writes, "One should marry a girl belonging to his own caste and impregnate her without crossing the religious restraints." Indiscriminate co-habitation (Impregnating a girl belonging to another caste in Bapuji's words) will produce intercaste progeny. This is injurious to our society and causes pain to the individual in this world and also in the other world by degrading our manes." This is in direct contradiction of the state's policy of promoting intercaste marriages and openly encourages casteism and caste discrimination. He even justifies the continuation of the ancient societal system of "Chaturvarnya" and deliberately promotes hatred between castes. For example, he writes, 'One should not partake of the meal that is brought by a Shudra (lowliest caste) or seen by a menstruating woman.' This is infringement of article 15 of the Constitution of India.

This booklet of Bapuji is full of unscientific and incorrect information regarding sexuality. See Bapuji's pearls of wisdom regarding sex: '... It is a scientific fact that the morality of a woman who is looked at by many men with amorous intentions gets demeaned.'; 'The progeny begotten from a lustful intercourse becomes lustful too.' 'When a mare in heat is mated with a stallion the foal will be of the same colour as that of the curtain that is held in front of the mare.' 'Those who indulge in sex during the fortnight meant for offering food, water, etc. to our manes, will have to drink semen in the other world; the same punishment will be meted out to their ancestors too.' 'Profusion of sperms will beget a male offspring and with the profusion of eggs the emotions of the offspring will be same as that of the man in harmony with the fruit of his

past birth's deeds.' So he goes on and on.

There is no dearth of blatantly false statements gilded in the jargon of physiological and other sciences in Bapuji's booklets. E.g., 'Molecules of fish were found in the body of the offspring because the father ate fish when his mother conceived him.' 'When Shandili rescinded the velocity of the Sun, the Sun did not rise for three days.' 'Leprosy is caused because of the sins committed in the earlier birth.' 'If a menstruating woman massages a pregnant woman, the child thus born happens to be a leper.' 'the sun and the moon are the eyes of the Maya-distinct (vishisht) Brahma.' 'Thinking of tuberculosis all the while made such deep impression on his mind that he actually developed tuberculosis.' 'During the devilish time of the evening, daemons, ghosts, pishach, etc. keep wandering around.' This book also gives some tips to women who want to produce male offspring. They are totally unscientific.

'Yauvan Suraksha' (protecting youth) is one more booklet of Bapuji wherein he makes fantastic statements regarding sex life and semen. These statements are as follows:

How is semen formed? The food that is digested turns into a juice. Bones are formed from fat, nerves from bones and semen from the nerves. Semen takes 30 days and 8 hours to form. From 32 kilos of food 800 grams of blood and 20 grams of semen is produced.

Destruction of the semen is death and protecting it is life.

With proper penance i.e. proper rites and observances, the seeker who advances in the Yogamarga by turning the semen in the upward direction, acquires many supernatural powers.

Can one believe these statements just because they happen to be made by Bapuji? Certainly not. Dr. Viththal Prabhu, the well known authority of sex education has written an article titled, 'Yauvanacya Umbarthyavar' (meaning on the threshold of youth). This well received book helps us determine the veracity of the above statements made by Bapuji.

Dr. Prabhu refers to 'Text Book of Medical Physiology' written by Guyton and explains in his article that blood and semen are in no way related to each other. The semen is a mixture of the secretions from the testes, prostate glands and seminal vesicles, as also the sperms. The sperms are generated in the testes in four stages that take 75 to 90 days. They are stored in Vas Deferens. Semen cannot be increased in quantity; it is a secretion like saliva, sweat or tears to be thrown out of the body. It is produced according to nature's rules like all other secretions of the body.

It is not under human control but is controlled by the involuntary nervous system. If the semen is not thrown out of the body it disintegrates into its components which are not of much value. Again even if large amount of semen is thrown out, it does not harm the body in any way and certainly does not cause death. Moreover there is no evidence to show that not throwing it out is beneficial for the health. If the semen travels up the body instead of being thrown out, it is a serious disease. Dr. Prabhu explains further, if the muscles controlling the bladder movement are injured during an operation of the prostate glands, the semen instead of coming out of the body through the urethra (during intercourse), is carried upwards into the bladder and is thrown out along with the urine. So the upward passage of the semen renders reproduction impossible; but does not affect the body in any other way. Dr. Prabhu's discussion regarding the passage of semen based on the science of physiology exposes the falsehood of Bapuji's statements. Moreover it helps people to get rid of the deep-rooted misconceptions about the discharge of semen.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, an intellectual leader of the progressive movement, has exposed the 'multifaceted personality' of Aasarambapu, in one of his articles. 'This self styled saint had predicted that the world will be destroyed in a great deluge on 4th May 1999 and to save oneself from this deluge one has to keep muttering the "Hari Om" mantra. But Bapuji's prediction turned out to be false and there was no deluge. The prediction, however, did affect Manoj Salunkhe, a 13 year old credulous student. He kept muttering the Mantra and bunked his school.' In the Gujarati edition of Chitralekha some very serious accusations are made against the character of this saint. Numerous literati and leaders have doubted Bapuji's spiritual experiments. How can such dubious character be called a saint? Saffron clothes and long beard do not a saint make. If we do not remember this we will have to repent.

When Sant Dnyaneshwar wrote his world renowned tome "Dnyaneshwari" he chose just a rough unhewn stone to recline on. Our modern Sant Bapuji, however needs plumb and soft seat along with all other comforts of modern life. Sant Tukaram led a life of utter poverty and yet he refused to accept the costly presents respectfully offered to him by Shivaji Maharaj. To-day the devotees are planning to offer 1.8 million rupees to Bapuji in return of his daily supply of meaningless philosophical preaching. They are not bothered how Bapuji is going to spend all this money collected from the common people. More worrisome than this is the fact that students are expected to spend (waste)

their precious time in the consecration ceremony of receiving the 'Sarawati Mantra' administered to them by Bapuji. But it will bring little benefit to them. The devotees who are eagerly awaiting Bapuji's Satsang should ponder over both these crucial points raised here.

That is why this warning, 'Friends beware of Aasarambapu's visit. The storm will soon catch up with us!'

11 Mar, 2004



Intellectual Class

Whether you accept the theory of a great man as the maker of history or you don't, this much you will have to concede, that in every country the intellectual class is the most influential class, if not the governing class.

The intellectual class is the class, which can foresee; it is the class, which can advise and give lead. In no country does the mass of the people live the life of intelligent thought and action. It is largely imitative and follows the intellectual class. There is no exaggeration in saying that the entire destiny of a country depends upon its intellectual class. If the intellectual class is honest, independent and disinterested, it can be trusted to take the initiative and give a proper lead when a crisis arises. It is true that intellect by itself is not a virtue. It is only a means and the use of means depends upon the ends that an intellectual pursues. An intellectual can be a good man but he can easily be a rogue too. Similarly an intellectual class may be a band of high-souled persons, ready to help, ready to emancipate erring humanity or it may be a gang of crooks or a body of advocates of a narrow clique, from which it draws its support.

Dr BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR

Chapter 7

Narendra Maharaj

Does he fit into the Lineage of our Revered Saints?

It is quite easy these days to become a saint, Buva or Maharaj. No need to contribute anything substantial in any field spiritual, social, educational or any other. It does not require much intelligence either. All you need is a little cleverness and cunning. A person with this much capital is approached by some people who are eager to start the Buvabaji business. They will tell you, 'You only nod your consent to become a Maharaj. We will take care of all the rest.' Once you give your consent, the next day you will be acclaimed as a Maharaj. Whatever you ordinarily speak, will be interpreted as something spiritually profound and will be published in the next day's news paper on the front page. In a short time you will find yourself to be a well established and respectable Maharaj; next a political party or a Spiritualist Organization will offer you an Honorary Doctorate or a similar degree.

It was quite different in the olden days. The saints who lived in the 11th and 12th century contributed a lot in many fields. Chakradhar Swami established his Mahanubhava Panth in the 12th century and secured for the Shoodras all their natural, religious and social rights that were due to them as human beings. In the 13th century Dnyaneshwar, who was harassed by the orthodox Brahmins of those days, wrote two tomes- Adwaita Bhakti Siddhant (The theory of identifying the human soul with the divine essence and achieving their unity through devotion) and Nishkam Bhavartha Deepika (elucidation of the Inherent meaning of 'being free from expectations') which later became popular as 'Dnyaneshwari'. In the same period Namadev raised the banner of the deity Vitthal and brought all people from the Brahmins to the Shoodras together in the 'Sagunopasana' (worship of god conceived as having attributes and perfections) of the deity Vitthal. He founded the 'Warkari Sampraday' (the sect of devotees of Vitthal who go on yearly

pilgrimage) and taught the people the philosophy of tolerance towards all religions and of devotion that is free of expectation. Namadeva led the masses to fight for their religious, social and cultural rights, revolting against the Vedic Religion. He did away with all the petty observances, pilgrimages, alms giving, Yadnyayag, propitiating ceremonies (anushtan), feeding the Brahmins, worshipping the idols, etc. and taught his disciples the totally inexpensive Bhaktimarga (worship without regard to precepts or prescribed rituals).

Dnyaneshwar wrote Abhangas (hymns in praise of deities) for the Varakari Sect and Namdev elucidated on the beauty in Dnyaneshwar's poetry for the devotees. From the 11th century up to the first half of the 14th century, a number of saints- Chakradhar Swami, Nagadevacharya, Pundalik (who propounded Viththal worship), Namadev and his contemporary Gora Kumbhar, Savata Mali, Parisa Bhagavat, Chokha Mela, Janabai, etc. - spent their life time in clearing off the environment muddled by the luminaries of the Vedic Religion. Sant Ekanath, born in the first half of the 16th century wrote copiously and breathed a new life into the Varkari Sect and renewed the movement which was interrupted for a while before his arrival on the scene. He preached morality in his Kirtan (narration punctuated with Music). Later, Sant Tukaram, born in the early 17th century, challenged the very authority of the religious coterie that put morality on sale in the name of religion. Tukaram's god was not propped up by any Paralaukik (other-worldly) values but rested on Human values. In his Abhangas he has sternly refuted the religious traditions of Vidhinishedh (sanctions or prohibitions), Vanavas (dwelling in the forest), pilgrimages, Sannyas (abandonment of all worldly possessions), Yadnya, Moksha (liberation from the cycle of births), Shraddha (ablution to the ancestors), fortune telling, concepts of auspicious/inauspicious, vows, Kaul (consulting an idol), Samadhi (self immolation), fasting, and also Yoga.

The following Abhangas reveal the unique philosophy of Tukaram. He says:

*No deceit I know, to defraud people;
As 'they' sing your praise, and virtues extol;
Can't prescribe herbs, nor by miracles cure;
No disciples for me, no unsought advice to offer.
Neither head of hermitage, nor a toiling farmer;
No rituals to worship god, thus I run my shop.
I don't propitiate daemons, so can't divine 'signs';*

*Not being a Puranik, can't tell something and do otherwise.
 No arguments in or out of home, as do the destitute Pundits; Don't
 burn bright lamps, just hail the god and be in good spirits.
 No rosary I keep or a flock of doddering old people around me,
 Not versed in the Shastra, spells and incantations,
 Can't restrain anyone or bewitch any.
 Very much unlike 'them', Tuka is a lone excentric.*

Gadgebaba, a 20th century saint, possessed all the attributes that make a Saint. He taught the simple ignorant people to believe in an abstract god; he also educated the people to beware of the self styled Sadhus who tried to make profit out of their faith. Sant Tukadoji Maharaj too contributed a lot to this mission.

Can we fit Narendra Maharaj of the Nanij Math in this saintly lineage? A cursory look at the exploits of Narendra Maharaj will provide the answer to this question. His real nature is revealed in an article written by Dr. Dabholkar. He was formerly known as Jagadish Surve. He had a job for some ten years but for some reason had to give it up. Then he proceeded on a pilgrimage of Pandharpur and Shegaon. During this pilgrimage, Surve announced that Gajanan Maharaj appeared before him when he wanted to commit suicide. After this he arrived at Nanij, planted a sapling of a fig tree there and started guiding people in spirituality.

In about 7 years Surve, turned Narendra Maharaj, was a big gun. He began his sermons and guidance for solving problems from the hill of Nanij. Nanij became the destination of regular monthly pilgrimage of the devotees of Narendra Maharaj. Every second Saturday of the month, 2 to 3 lack devotees gathered and queued at the Math of Narendra Maharaj. For hours they would stay in the queue heedless of sun, wind or rain. There used to be separate queues- one for 'Darshan'-mere look at the Maharaj, another special queue for those who wanted to ask questions. People eager to know what is in store for them, would wait with women and children in the queue for more than a day or two. Waiting in itself, was for them, part of the Bhakti- devotion to the Maharaj. Devotion, as everyone knows, is inadvertently accompanied by trade. Nanij Math charged two rupees for a bucket of bath water, half a rupee for using toilet and 15 rupees for a meal.

All stalls, whether they stocked books, Prasad, cold drinks or whatever, are owned by the Math. The coconut that costs Rs. 7/- in the market is sold at Rs. 10/- here. The coconut is to be offered to Narendra Maharaj which is sneaked out into the coconut stall again. A pen with a

picture of the Maharaj on it is sold for Rs.10/- while a similar badge at Rs. 5/-. This badge is called 'Suraksha Chakra'- a protective shield. Only those, who wear it on their chests, will survive in this world. In addition there is a book 'Leelamrit' on sale, which is full of miraculous exploits of Narendra Maharaj. This book is sold for Rs. 50/-. Every devotee who visits the Math buys the 'Leelamrit', the Pen, the Badge and the coconut. Expenses on the part of the Math too are mind boggling. Khava (conglomerated milk) worth Rs. 1.5 lack is ordered from Sangli every day. 200 to 250 men serve here day and night. The daily expense for their maintenance totals up to Rs. 25000/-, at the rate of Rs. 100/- per employee. That comes to six and a half lacks per month. But more astonishing of all is the fact that this Maharaj who is capable of providing protective shields to all his devotees needs a revolver to protect himself. More over there are plenty of rumors about the characters of the employees working in the service of the Maharaj.

Narendra Maharaj has declared a 'Ratha Yatra', i.e. parading in a chariot. About one lack people would start parading from four different places and reach Nanij. The approximate cost will be two crores. About the same time he also predicted that the third world war will break on 18th of July 1999 drawing the whole world gradually into the conflagration and last till 2006. The people who will be displaced in this war will be rehabilitated by 2010, by which time the 'Satyayug' (the golden age of universal purity and probity) will arrive here, in this world. His devotees claim that 'Narendra Maharaj, the prophet of the golden era, has brought this message to the mortals of this world, directly from god.' Nostradamus had predicted that around the year 2000, a Hindu king from the south will conquer the world and rule over it. Devotees of Narendra Maharaj claim that 'the description of this Hindu king as given by Nostradamus is a perfect fit of our Maharaj. That is why our deepest concern now is how to find ways to face the danger of destruction, looming on the horizon. We are intensely deliberating over it, under the guidance of Narendra Maharaj. All men and women, therefore, should make it a point not to miss their monthly Vari and seek Swamiji's advice in this connection without fail.'

See these words of wisdom pronounced by Narendra Maharaj- who claims to shoulder the responsibility for the weal of the world. He says:

“We will mercilessly beat to death those who criticize us. The journalist dogs should be beaten by shoes and slippers. We will strip the ANS activists of clothes. Those who disparage us are eunuchs. Their heads will be severed from their bodies at our hands. The world war that

will engulf humanity 11 months hence will kill all these rascals. Only those who worship me will be saved. Devotion to me is so potent that it will form a sort of net in the noses of my devotees and this net will prevent the poisonous gasses from entering my devotees' lungs, etc., etc.”

When Sant Dnyaneshwar wrote 'Pasayadan' (the prayer at the end of his tome Dnyaneshwari), he prayed for the weal of the world but did not exclude any orthodox Brahmins, at whose hands he suffered a lot. Sant Tukaram politely returned the valuables respectfully offered to him by Shivaji Maharaj and therefore had the courage to severely censure the Machiavellian religious pretenders. Samarth Ramadas crisscrossed the mountains and valleys of Maharashtra to awaken the spirit of independence in the people and literally wore out himself. Gadge Baba and Tukadoji Maharaj awakened the people against animal sacrifice and cleaned the villages themselves with brooms in their own hands to induce the villagers to keep their villages clean and appreciate the importance of cleanliness. Has Narendra Maharaj who is made a Sant by his devotees any such track record? To find anything worth mentioning seems impossible.

19 Apr, 2005



Unquestioned Faith

Religion is scarcely distinguishable from childhood delusions like the “imaginary friend” and the bogeyman under the bed.

Unfortunately the God delusion possesses adults. A delusion is something that people believe in despite a total lack of evidence and such delusions ask for trouble because disagreements between incompatible beliefs cannot be settled by reasonable argument.

Most religious people are very decent and nice. But in a sense they have brought religious extremism on the world by teaching people the virtues of unquestioned faith

**RICHARD DAWKINS
(The God Delusion)**

Ceremonial Milk Ablutions and Raul Maharaj

With enhanced culture, Civilizations give up their older practices that become meaningless. The practice of Yadnya, sacrificing animals in the Yadnya and performing similar wasteful religious ceremonies too became obsolete as the Vedic culture reached a higher level. It was the founders of the Jain and the Bauddha Religions, who realizing its wasteful and destructive nature, struggled against the Yadnya tradition. Finally an inexpensive and simple practice of worship displaced the Yadnya rituals as the civilization advanced. In the 'Shrimadbhagavadgeeta' (Geeta in short), in the chapter on 'Dnyana-Karma-Sannyasa Yoga', Krishna advises Arjun, 'Oh Arjun, the Yadnya that involves Dnyan-intellectual percipience- is superior to the Yadnya that involves material stuff and riches, because all your Karma (actions and deeds) leads to Dnyan.' In the 'Bhagvat' (one of the 18 Purans) it is said, 'offering leaves, flowers, fruits and water with sincere devotion completes the ritual of worship'. In the present times, however, we seem to have forgotten Shrikrishna's advice to Arjun and what is said in the Bhagavat Puran. Reviving of the expensive and wasteful Yadnya practice is in vogue now. Our politicians and religious luminaries, Brahmins and non-Brahmins alike compete with each other in sacrificing precious resources and treasures in Yادنyas. In addition to this a new pompous religious ceremony of 'Milk Abhishek' has become an 'in thing' these days.

In the south Konkan region, there lived a Spiritual man called Raul Maharaj. His disciples have planned a memorial function in his honour that includes bathing the statue of the Maharaj with milk. ('Gomantak', 12th February) This Maharaj from Pinguli belonged to the 'Avadhut Sampraday'-an order of Gosavis who roam about in nudity reciting Avadhut Geeta-from Bhagvat Puran. Gosavis are mostly Shoodras also Brahmins at times, who renounce worldly business, pleasures and

affections. Raul Maharaj was renowned in the field of spirituality. He was revered by devotees not only from Raul (the village) and its vicinity but also from Savantvadi, Vengurle and north Goa. The devotees expected propitiating and religious ceremonies in the programme. This much one can understand; but including the ablution in milk, that too for an Avadhut (devoid of sensuous or carnal affections) is certainly a cause for worry. This does not mean that religious programmes should be devoid of any Abhishek (ablution). But the ablution should be with water that is easily available and inexpensive. In the daily worship, the idols in a household are bathed with milk, curds and ghee; but they are used in such small measure that ordinary people can afford it. Moreover mostly water is used for Abhishek. It is criminal to use milk for bathing a huge statue, for milk provides complete nutrition for children. Many people in our country cannot afford to give milk even to their children. Before independence, a drink of milk was a luxury for them. Even if one believes in the myth that in ancient India, there used to be smoke of gold from the houses (meaning over abundance of riches), the fact remains that today a poor man cannot afford even cow dung cakes and wood sticks for fuel to cause any smoke whatsoever. After independence many experiments, tests and trials were carried out in agriculture and animal husbandry, resulting in green and white revolutions. The poor could then at least know what milk means. Thousands of children yet cannot drink milk because it is still not affordable to those below the poverty line. With this background can the ceremonial ablution in milk of a statue as part of a religious function be justified? Is it not an unpardonable waste of the precious constituent of children's diet? Squandering thousands of liters of milk in this way is a loathsome show of opulence.

Such ablutions in milk have so far been organized at various religious places. They are vehemently opposed by many organizations publicly wherever and whenever they take place. The famous statue of Bahubali in the Hasan district of Karnataka is a typical case. This 57 feet tall statue is carved out of one huge boulder that is part of the hill. Bahubali is the son of Adinath, the first Jain Tirthankar. A gigantic ceremony was arranged for the ablution in milk of this statue about 23 years back. Thousands of liters of milk were to be procured from all parts of the country. A helicopter was to be deployed for pouring milk on the statue. Many progressive organizations from all over the country opposed this ceremony because of the colossal waste of milk involved in it.

Another similar ceremony was carried out, about four years back, in the Month of Shravan, at a sacred place called 'Shrinagesh'. Tankers of

milk were brought from Kolhapur. It was decided to fill the sanctum sanctorum of the deity with milk. After the Abhishek, the milk was to be distributed as Teertha - holy water blessed by the deity. But after ablution the milk collected was likely to be polluted and unfit for consumption. The organizers had to face severe criticism because of it. For, however pious the Teertha might be, if polluted, it is sure to cause indisposition among people. It may even cause an epidemic of diarrhea. Organizations indulging in ablutions of milk should never ignore this fact.

The great Guru Raul Maharaj in whose honour the trust had arranged the programme of ablution with milk had never instructed anyone to give him a bath of milk. In fact no saintly man had ever ordered any of his devotees to do such a doubtful honour to him. Contribution made by poor devotees voluntarily or under compulsion, is utilized for Yadnyas and religious ceremonies in the name of saintly men. But the ordinary people (those who pay through their nose) get no benefit out of it. All these futile and unproductive rituals cause colossal destruction of provision that can fill the empty stomachs of thousands of poor people. Humanist outlook dictates that we ought to eschew religious sacrifices, milk ablutions and all other ceremonies that cause such unpardonable waste.

This may not be in line with the orthodox religious view; but the view is certainly not a 21st century view. It has been aired in the ancient days and was also approved and accepted by the culture of those days. Tarkteertha Lakshman Shastri Joshi quite unambiguously states that the references from various Sanhitas (the texts of the Vedas) prove that the Yadnyiks (the officiating priests of Yadnya) themselves lowered the importance of Yadnyas and extolled mental worship or abstract contemplation as an important part of the sacrificial ceremony. They enunciated the principle- 'recognized religious ceremonies that are sincerely performed with austerities and penances are more potent and heroic than the ostentatious ones. Ashvamedh (horse sacrifice), Agnichayan (sacrifice with a bird-shaped altar), Mahavrata and other major Yadnyas can be performed as mental worship and are equally fruitful. Actual performance of these fire sacrifices is not necessary.' Shastriji says, 'this theory is mentioned in the Brahman Granthas and Aranyakas and is justified by the authors of Brahmasootra and Bhashyakars (commentators). The sage Kavaseya says in the concluding part of the Shankhayan and Aitareya Aranyakas that "we do not need to study Vedas or perform Yadnyas". (Incidentally Aranyakas are so named because they are written in the wild, away from madding crowds). In the Agnirahasya of Shatapatha Brahmin, it is said that the stage where all

cravings are satiated cannot be reached by giving Dakshina - monetary gifts. An ignorant ascetic too cannot reach that stage with his self punishing penance. To reach there what is needed is wisdom and worship with sincere austerities and penances.

As mentioned earlier the Yadnya tradition is being revived with vengeance now. A few years back in Kerala, a grand “Putrakameshti Yadnya” (Yadnya that promises male progeny) was celebrated with great pomp and show. At another place-in Chandkur town, a former Prime Minister spent three crores in performing a Mahayadnya (imposing Yadnya) in the hope that it will help him retain his position as PM. At Madgaon in Goa, a Mahayadnya 'Somyag' (wherein the juice of Soma is drunk) was performed four years back. In all these brazen religious ceremonies, hundreds of tons of pure ghee and other precious provisions were burnt. And what was achieved? Only carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide, the most destructive atmospheric pollutants! Deve Gauda could not retain his prime Ministership; nor did any couple beget a son. The meaningless Milk Abhishek too is equally unrewarding and will ever remain so. The 'Raul Maharaj Seva Yrust' of Kudal has included in their plan erection of a portico in front of the sanctum sanctorum. This is a good idea as the portico will be of much use to the ordinary devotees. By using their funds for such constructive and useful purposes Religious Trusts will be able to fulfill their obligation toward the devotees whose hard earned money (at times even easy money) makes up the trust's funds.

28 Feb, 2005



- *God exists, if only in the form of a meme with high survival value, or infective power, in the environment provided by human culture.*
- *I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world.*
- *Isn't it sad to go to your grave without ever wondering why you were born? Who, with such a thought, would not spring from bed, eager to resume discovering the world and rejoicing to be part of it?*

RICHARD DAWKINS

The Todkar Maharaj Affair

Probe and Moral

Shivaling Mahadev Todakar, a resident of Kolhapur, was arrested for his sexual misdemeanors and the halo of spiritual power around this self anointed Maharaj disappeared. The real man in the disguise of a 'Maharaj' was exposed in the editorial, 'A Religious Luminary with difference', of the news paper, 'Gomantak' of 24th January. Not only did the editorial bare the true character of this self styled Maharaj, but it also awakened the gullible devotees whom he so easily caught in his wily net. We are very grateful to 'Gomantak' for its timely word of caution and counsel. From what we understand about Todakar, from the articles published in various magazines, is that fortune telling was the main component of his multifarious enterprises and 'Dronagiri Ashram' was the hub of all his business. Hundreds of devotees eager to know their future used to line up there very early every morning. The arrest of Todakar reminds me of another fortune teller exposed by a remarkable social worker dwelling in the same city of Kolhapur as does Todkar. This social worker is none other than Shahu Maharaj, the saintly king of the Kolhapur state and the founder of forward-looking nationalist movements of modern India. He presided over a conference organized by the "Arya Dharma Parishad" at Navasary in Gujarat state. In his presidential address he reprimanded astrologers sharply, as he said, 'fortune telling is nothing but an untruth fabricated deliberately by some vested interests. They have evolved many ways of frightening people of the influence of various maleficent planets. They decide which day is good and which is bad for travelling, marriage, thread ceremony, etc. and tighten the vise of idiotic religious notions on the social psyche.' To prove the veracity of his thoughts he publicly arrested an astrologer, who was forecasting the future of all people whom he came across. The Maharaja proved to the people of Kolhapur, that the fortune teller who roams about divulging the futures of others could not perceive

what was in store for him on the day he met Shahu Maharaj. Todkar Maharaj had to face the same fate. He was arrested but had no inkling of his arrest in advance and had to spend the night in the custody. He was also beaten and battered by people before his arrest. Todkar Maharaj did not possess any spiritual power to prevent either his arrest or the wrath of the people. Yet next morning many people came forward to sign a security bond for his release. This is certainly a cause for worry.

A Succession of immoral Maharajas

Todkar Maharaj is charged of criminal misbehavior with women and inveigling many devotees on the pretext of revealing their future. Actually Todkar is not the first person to commit this kind of a crime. There were many such Maharajas before him who committed more serious crimes, such as cheating people who were infatuated with them and having immoral relations with many female devotees. The Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon was one specimen of this tradition. In his autobiography, 'Karheche Pani', Acharya Atre has exposed the debauchery and other misdeeds of Narayan Maharaj. This Maharaj looted a very well known singer, Anjanibai Malpekar of all her wealth. Anjanibai had earned a lot of money but was left with not even a penny and could not afford even to buy medicine for herself in her old age. Narayan Maharaj fleeced many other devotees of their money and jewelry that was kept with the Maharaj as safe deposit in full faith.

Narayan Maharaj swindled a large sum of money deposited with him by one of his devotees. This devotee filed a suit against Narayan Maharaj in the court. The court issued a warrant to arrest him. But Narayan Maharaj, the self-proclaimed incarnation of the deity Datta, had to abscond to evade his own arrest. His pretence of being an incarnation of Datta Guru was laid bare. Lending money to people at a very high rate of interest and recovering the interest and the principal by force was his real occupation. He used to do it surreptitiously and nobody dared raise any clamor out of fear of his much talked about spiritual powers. One of his disciples was a beautiful wife of a rich businessman. Narayan Maharaj was fascinated by her. But the husband was a stumbling block making it difficult for him to reach the lady. So Narayan Maharaj attracted the businessman and was successful in removing the stumbling block with the help of his paid tough guys. After that the Maharaj could freely carry on with his affair with the lady. Acharya Atre has elaborately described the activities of Narayan Maharaj in his book, 'Asha Goshti; Asha Gamati' (Such Amusing Stories).

There are many such spiritual Maharajas as debauching and as corrupt

as Narayan Maharaj. They are Upasaneer Maharaj, Sunderdas Maharaj, Sadacharee Swami, to name just a few. All of them lured gullible devout people into their net and robbed them. They sexually exploited many women. It is not possible to relate all their exploits in this small narrative. But what all this boils down to is that throughout history, gullible common people are being exploited by dishonest scamps who pretend to be spiritual gurus. Many social reformers like Swatantrya Veer (Hero of Freedom) Savarkar, Mahadevshastri Divekar, Prabodhankar Thakare, Sant Gadage Maharaj and many more, have tried to educate and awaken gullible people to be wary about these spiritual thugs. The renowned litterateur Acharya Atre and others like him wrote a number of plays. But they were looked at as nothing more than entertainment. They could not inculcate the attitude of being wary of Buvabaji and the bogus spirituality of the Buvas for defrauding gullible people. Many psychologists are investigating into the cause of this reluctance to learn a lesson from the plays or when the Maharaj is exposed. They have arrived at some important conclusions.

Dr. Chandrashekhar Pande teaches psychology in the University of Nagpur. His investigation reveals that there are two types of Buvas. Some of them are perverse and crack brained. They are made Buvas by their so called devotees. They interpret even the dirty abuses of their own Buva and draw profound meaning out of them. The other kinds of Buvas systematically exploit superstitions among people. They know very well that people will not revere them unless they demonstrate miracles. So they learn to perform miracles by sleight of hand and claim to have acquired supernatural powers to allure people. The devotees too are of two types. Some are mentally weak; they do not have the courage to face the ups and downs of life. Falling sick or losing a job and such other difficulties make them superstitious. The other kind of devotees approach the Buvas because of their guilty feeling. They feel guilty because they lead a life devoid of any values; they want to rinse themselves of the sins they have committed and seek support from the Buva.

Struggle against Buvabaji is essential

People in power too are responsible for encouraging Buvabaji. They themselves are devoted to some Buva or Baba and lead people to imitate them. Parents scare their children with various means for their short term convenience which helps superstition to take roots in their minds. Our faulty education system too is responsible for increasing superstition and Buvabaji. One of the objectives of education as stated in our constitution is to inculcate objectivity and inquisitiveness among the students. But in

actual practice what we observe is just the opposite of it. We learn (and teach) science but do not live it. Buvabaji cannot be eradicated without instilling inquisitive attitude in the community. Miracle mongering Buvas ought to be challenged and exposed. M.P. Rege, the great intellectual and professor of philosophy believed that the basic stance of our religion is responsible for Buvabaji. Buvabaji is not so prevalent in the regions where Christianity is rooted deeply because the religion is opposed to any private Buvas. The Church controls all religious matters and the Christians firmly believe that there cannot be any authority outside the Church. The Church also teaches Christian people that Black Magic emanates from the Satan; miracle mongering therefore is a sure way to get entrapped by the Satan. So wherever Christianity prevails, the religious belief restrains Buvabaji.

Contrary to this, in India, religion nourishes Buvabaji. There are two main beliefs deeply rooted in our minds that facilitate Buvabaji. One is that spiritual preparation is necessary to gain the knowledge of ultimate truth which is attained after Sakshatkar (manifestation of god). It means one's own efforts are not enough for knowing the ultimate truth. The favour and instruction from a Sakshatkari Purush (one who has experienced the vision of god) is necessary. To receive the favour of such Guru, one has to surrender to him completely and have absolute faith in him. One must do whatever the Guru tells him to do to test his faith in him. This mind set produces Buvas. Second belief is that truths discovered by science are superficial. There is a lot more of unfathomed, unexplained knowledge. Knowledge of the manifestation of mysterious powers is possible only to a Sakshatkari Purush. He can control the mysterious powers in the interest of humanity. Because of this notion people believe that the miracles performed by the Buvas are real. So in order to rein in Buvabaji, it is necessary to expose the miracle mongering imposters and their frauds. It is equally necessary to spread scientific outlook among the people. But unless the deep rooted religious foundation-the mindset conducive to Buvabaji is changed, Buvabaji will not be controlled. The seats of religion should shoulder this responsibility. We need such selfless religious precepts that are frank enough to tell people, "Our religious scriptures are written by men (not revealed by god). No human being is endowed with even a tiny bit of 'god'. Miracles are not possible in the world. And nobody's blessings (but your own effort) can brighten your life." Such a message coming from the seats of religion will surely rein in the uncontrollable menace of Buvabaji.



1 Feb, 2005

Supernatural Ability of Sweetening

Any important festive ceremony, as is the convention, ought to be inaugurated by a Minister or a very high ranking government officer. But on 15th December, news flashed in the daily 'Gomantak', 'Gode (pronounced like mode) Baba inaugurated the Food Festival organized by a hotel in Kudal (Sindhudurg district). Goans were now curious to know who this Gode Baba is and why was he given the honour of inaugurating the Food Festival? What status does he have in the society? What and in which field has he made any notable contribution? To intensify people's curiosity Gode Baba responded, 'My body itself is a subject for investigation' and added confusion to the mystery.

This 'Gode Baba' has a history. A few years back he had received publicity through a couple of magazines; and his claim that 'whatever he touches becomes sweet because of the mystical power that he has acquired,' was also debated. However public memory being short-lived, the whole episode of Gode Baba and his mystical sweetening power was forgotten. And the youngsters of today may not even know about him or have heard about him. Let us see how the Gode Baba myth and Baba's gimmicks to fool people developed.

This man before becoming the 'Gode Baba' was a mundane farmer residing in Baramati. His name is Bhanudas Gayakvad. In 1982, as he claims, while resting under a tree, it suddenly struck him that some supernatural energy has entered into his body. And since then, he claims again, that he had acquired the supernatural power of making sweet everything that he touched. In the same year, Dr. Akolkar, the head of the institute of Para-psychology at Pune examined his claim and deduced that 'the mysterious power of alchemy inhering his body is related to metabolic and bio-chemical processes.' Next year the working president of ANS, Dr. Narendra Dabholkar visited Baramati. There Gode Baba was examined at the Bungalow of the well known advocate Shri Vijay

More. The water that Gode Baba had touched and sweetened was analyzed in a laboratory. It was found that the water contained Saccharine. The result was published, quite conspicuously, in many magazines and news papers. With this the inflated balloon of Gode Baba's mysterious powers had been burst, for, saccharine is a synthetic product and can never be part of any biochemical process in the human body. It was clear that the sweetness of the water was due to the synthetic substance-saccharine which is 500 times sweeter than sugar and never found in human body; and also that it was externally added to the water. This was possible only if Gode Baba had rubbed saccharine powder on his palms and fingers. The flaw in Dr. Akolkar's tests was that he did not take this possibility into account. As a result he arrived at those strange, unbelievable conclusions.

This was long time back and with the passage of time the episode was forgotten. But Gode Baba once again started public demonstrations of his so called supernatural power of sweetening substances with mere touch of his hand. One demonstration was held in the presence of Balasaheb Thakerey, the head of the Shivasena. This put him in the lime light again. Some English magazines too published stories about Gode Baba's supernatural power of sweetening things.

Then an incident, unfortunate for Gode Baba, took place. A demonstration by Gode Baba was organized in the General Post Office headquarter in Mumbai. Rekhabai Deshpande, an official in the GPO head quarter, went out of the office while the demonstration was in full swing. She bought some saccharine pills and returned to office. Next she too sweetened water, just like Gode Baba did and all her colleagues were taken aback. The Baba had to retreat. But there was more damage to come. Rekha Ratnani, the then correspondent of 'India Today', took a sample of the water sweetened by Gode Baba, sealed it and sent it to the 'Indian Drugs and Research Laboratory', Pune, for analysis. The report confirmed that the sample contained Saccharine. 'India Today' published the findings in bold headlines on the front page of their 15th August 1993 issue.

After being exposed so thoroughly, Gode Baba should have given up his demonstrations thereafter. But he continued. In addition, he enlisted the support of the Spiritualist Dr. P.V. Vartak who readily came to his help. Incidentally Dr. Vartak surpasses all spiritual Babas in making fantastic claims of his powers, claims that dumbfound all people. A few specimens of his claims: He had been to the planets Mars and Jupiter and

minutely observed the conditions there much before the American space capsule reached there; he had to transform himself into “Lingadeha” (the tenuous or ethereal body) in order to achieve this feat; and many more such claims. He makes these loud claims in his public speeches. Just three years back, he made a fantastic claim that he carefully watched the notorious 'nine eleven' incident of destruction by the dreaded terrorists, of the Twin Towers, harbouring the Head Quarter of WTO in America, from the planet Venus where he had been at that time! He also makes it a point to stress that he has acquired, through his Adhyatmasadhana a strenuous study of the science of spirit- the ability to perform miracles. To enlist support for his own claims, he championed Gode Baba's cause and popularized his demonstrations of miraculously sweetening things by merely touching them. Thus Dr. Vartak and Gode Baba made a typical pair of 'Siddha-Sadhak'- a pair bearing out each others' pretensions. The pair visited town after town giving demonstrations of their miracles.

Dr. Vartak projected Gode Baba as a great virtuous man with spiritual supernatural powers, through his public speeches. In November 1995, Gode Baba held a public demonstration of his miracle in Jalgaon, where, he turned normal water sweet even after washing his hands with soap and water. A few ANS activists had attended this programme. They too washed their hands with water and soap and yet made the water and few other things sweet by mere touch. (The secret is the not so well known fact that when saccharine is rubbed on the fingers it does not wash away completely even with soap and water. And the residue of it is enough to make things sweet to taste. It can be washed completely with ether, acetone or spirit in which it dissolves completely.)

The ANS activists suggested that Gode Baba wash his hands with any one of the above solvents before performing his miracle. The Baba obviously refused to do so. Dr. Vartak who claimed to be able to visit other planets supported Baba's refusal. But the episode did not end there. On 16th Dec. 1995, Dr. Narendra Dabholkar met with Gode Baba at Pune and challenged his miracle mongering in a written letter containing the usual conditions of the process of meeting the challenge. The Baba asked for some time during which Dr. Dabholkar received threatening phone calls as well as threats through news papers. Then the Baba replied Dr. Dabholkar's letter, again, through news papers imposing irrelevant conditions on Dr. Dabholkar. The draft prepared by Gode Baba for the process of fulfilling the challenge, contained a strange clause- he (Baba) rebutted the argument that if saccharine is found in the water sweetened by him, it proves that what he is doing is not a miracle but a sleight of

hand. (The content of this clause is more than enough to falsify his claim of possessing supernatural power.)

The sample of water sweetened by Gode Baba was examined in the Laboratory of 'Shriram Scientific and Industrial Research Foundation', Dilly. It found that the sample of water contained 400 mg of Saccharine per litre. The authentic copy of the report from this laboratory is available with the ANS office. Renowned scientist, Dr. Vasantrao Govarikar, Paul Datta, the institution 'People's science', Marathi Vednyan Parishad (an institution for propagating science through Marathi Language) and many others were ready to examine Gode Babas water but the Baba refused to respond. His refusal tells it all.

But there is a difference between Gode Baba and other Babas who roam about from place to place, demonstrating their so called spiritual powers and captivating gullible people with their gimmicks. Gode Baba does not indulge in any of these tactics to earn money. All he expects from people is that they acknowledge that he has acquired spiritual power. Of course he has every right to expect whatever is dear to his heart. However we cannot afford to forget the fact that in the deceptive labyrinth of the world, we live in, we should refrain at all costs, from the blind belief that some people can possess a bit of divinity in them or miracles are possible or someone with spiritual powers can bless you and make a difference in your life. This habit of believing in idle stories hampers our progress and should be eradicated from its roots.

23 Dec, 2004



Humankind

I offer, to those who want it, a religious humanism that is human-centered; not god-centered In this view our lives have meaning, but it is meaning that we and our communities give them, not meaning that is derived from a supernatural source. We have to act as if we have free will because we can do nothing else. But we and our communities have to develop our own ethics. There are no moral imperatives and no universal code of morality, no automatic rewards for good deeds, no automatic punishments for bad deeds, no God looking over our shoulders. All we can do is strive to improve ourselves and our world; and we are completely on our own. The power to improve the system further and to extend our good fortune to the rest of the world is in us and our own rational thinking, not in God.

MATT YOUNG

Osho Rajneesh

The Architect of Nude Group Dance

There is a huge gathering of devotees. The Bhagawan enters into the hall. People are all ears. In a sweet beguiling tone Bhagawan instructs the devotees. They follow his instructions. Gradually they start puffing and panting as though under some demoniac possession. In the beginning the tempo is slow but it rapidly accelerates. The devotees make strange noises like rha rha, dha dha, dhu dhu, oh oh, etc. Some start hopping and skipping or turning round and round. Others begin to roll wildly. When the hypnotic trance reaches its peak, men and women in the audience throw away their clothes and begin to dance in nude. The calm and composed Bhagawan oversees all this foul, loathsome display from his high seat on the dais. After a while he starts giving commands one after another- 'stop!' All the nude dancers stop. He says, 'Start' and the wild horseplay instantly begin again. With the command 'lie down', the wild dancers collapse on the floor like dead men. This is what was going on in the name of spirituality. Isn't this a westernized mockery of the concept of spiritual science? The men and women under the spell of Bhagawan Rajneesh are indulging in this mockery for years on end. These very men and women have elevated Rajneesh, the erstwhile professor of philosophy to the status of Bhagawan (god).

Most Buvas and Babas use religious rites or charms, incantations or mystical verses in their profession. Some practice mesmerism. Some Babas are internationally famous for mesmerizing people and making them act according to the Baba's instructions. Bhagawan (god) Rajneesh was one such mesmerizing Baba, who, before becoming a Baba, was a professor of philosophy. He was endowed with many capabilities a command over English and Hindi languages, a sweet tongue, a pleasant voice, enormous scholarship and a very impressive oratory. While in the teaching profession he was simultaneously doing research in the field of

psychology. He invented, as part of his research, over a hundred varieties of 'Sakriya Dhyan' (active meditation as opposed to meditation where a person sits still in one position concentrating his mind); but the core of his research had always been mass mesmerism or hypnotism.

The professor turned Bhagawan Rajneesh was an expert in argumentation. To defend his sessions of mass nude dancing, he argued, 'my spiritual exercises are meant to relieve the tense minds and are based on psychology.' The justification of such wild dancing given by the Bhagawan is absurd because though mesmerizing people to help them get rid of their mental tension is acceptable, it is not necessary to hypnotize men and women to indulge in a wild dance in nudity. Rajneesh has exceeded all limits of decency and decorum in this regard.

Rajneesh established his own weird cult and received a large following of devotees, who hero-worshipped Rajneesh and compared him with gods like Shri Krishna, Jesus Christ, Mahaveer and Gautama Buddha. His sermons were no less than the Upanishads (philosophical treatises) of the Vedic Literature according to his devotees. Rumors were spread that Rajneesh was blessed with a divine vision, when at 21 years of age, he was sitting under a Bakul tree (jungle geranium) in a garden in Jabalpur. The divine vision, in turn, blessed him with Parama Dnyan (the ultimate truth or knowledge of Brahma). The young visionary was now publicized (and also marketed by his cronies) as the very God incarnate! The point to note here is that Rajneesh himself never took the trouble to categorically deny that he was god personified. He assumed himself to be Bhagawan -god embodied. Whenever devotees fell at his feet, he did not prevent anyone from doing so. He on the contrary, used to bless the fellow condescendingly raising his hand. He amassed colossal wealth from the devotees as Dakshina (donations of money and presents). He lived like a Maharaja of the yester years. He toured in a convoy of 96 Rolce Royce, with a hit squad of armed body guards. He did not have to come out of the car to let the devotees have a glimpse of their Bhagawan. They had to satisfy themselves with looking at him through the windowpane of his car. Ordinary people could not afford even a little glimpse of him. Helicopters equipped with rockets hovered above his car.

He argues, sex drive being the pivot of human existence, a free and unrestrained life is the way to self emancipation. From this he derived and propagated his philosophy 'from carnal enjoyment to devout meditation and emancipation'. He refused to disclose to the public the

source of his vast riches. Even the consumerist Americans thought it fit to drive Rajneesh out of their territory and the Bhagawan then had to settle in Pune. He established the 'Osho Ashram' in Pune with many of his followers. But the people of Pune did not accept his philosophy and did not allow him to spread his tentacles there. The professor turned Bhagawan and later 'Osho' (Gautama Buddha) was always caught in the whirlpool of controversies.

Buddha lived a simple life abandoning all worldly possessions and earthly affections. Rajneesh who called himself Osho- the Gautama Buddha, lived in all possible comforts and luxuries. He tried to impose on the people here, his consumerist, voluptuous philosophy which is completely at odds with the Indian life style and culture. It was bound to fail. For, the common man here, is devoted to that god who understands the woes of his playmates in the Gokul (the place where Lord Krishna spent his childhood) and who enjoys the handful of puffed rice offered to him by his extremely poor friend Sudama. He is their Bhagawan-Yogeshwar Krishna (the most saintly god devoid of any carnal cravings). They will never accept the Bhogeshvar (indulging in all sorts of pleasures) Rajaneesh in his place. People hated Rajaneesh's philosophy that commended indulgence. The Indians believe and revere the ideas of god, the supreme lord, spirituality and deliverance and Rajaneesh mocked at all these ideas and made them cheap and mean. So people of Pune hated him till the end.

23 Feb, 2004



Religion and Science

The Vedas, Zend Avesta, the Dhammapada, the Bible, the Koran and the rest of the principal religious books will never become out of date: they are final, immutable and eternal. Exactly the opposite is true of books on science: there is nothing final about them, nothing immutable or eternal. Unless they get out of date in double quick time science cannot grow, and it is this which leads science from truth to larger truth, from insight to deeper and more penetrative insight.

The moment you begin to question you cease to be a man of religion; and the moment you stop questioning you cease to be a man of science.

V. R. NARLA

Satya Saibaba

The Secret of his Miracles

The Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti publishes a monthly magazine, 'Vartapatra' from Sangli. In the April issue of this magazine Professor Waghmare, from Manchar, a town in Pune district, wrote a letter. In his news cum letter to the editor, he stated, 'on the last Mahashivaratri day Satya Saibaba miraculously brought forth a Shiva ling from his mouth in his Prashant Neelam Ashram. Many devotees watched this incident as a divine miracle performed by Saibaba.' (Mahashivaratri is a great festival of Lord Shiva, celebrated on the fourteenth of the latter fortnight of Magh, the 11th month of the Hindu Lunar calendar.) Along with this news, Waghmare specifically pointed out that the whole episode was a shameful deceit perpetrated by the crafty Baba and his equally crafty disciples, for, the Shiva ling was not created but had been concealed in a napkin in advance. Many a professional Buva and Maharaj routinely perform the miracle of generating a Shiva ling and the gullible devotees watch it as a divine miracle.

The plain fact, however is that producing a Shiva ling from one's mouth is a simple sleight of hand and any student of conjuring or Magical tricks can perform this 'miracle' with a little practice. All that it needs is a starched napkin, an empty flower pot and a one and half inch Shiva ling. The performance can be described like a laboratory experiment in precise steps as follows.

- Rap a Shiva ling in one corner of a napkin and tuck it in the flower pot before the commencement of the performance. Take care that it looks to be a part of the decor.
- As the performance proceeds, pretend to have developed a sudden stomachache. Start groaning and grumbling; press your stomach

with your right hand. Keep pressing and groaning.

- Gently pull the napkin out of the flower pot with the Shiva ling still tucked in its corner with your left hand.
- Pretend to wipe the sweat off your neck with the napkin. Gradually bring the napkin in front of your face and pretend to wipe the sweat on your face with the napkin in the left hand. Keep stomach pressed with your right hand.
- Next pretend to wipe out the saliva that is supposed to be oozing from your mouth.
- While still wiping the saliva, slip the Shiva ling from the napkin into the mouth nonchalantly.
- Lastly stop groaning and draw the Shiva ling out of your mouth.
- Give a sigh of relief and pompously display the ling before the audience.
- When the ling is placed before the audience, they reckon that it was produced in the mouth with the blessings of the Lord.

Another plain trickery

Shiva ling can be produced from the mouth by another technique which is practiced by the Hatha-Yogis. Hatha Yoga is one mode of Yoga, in the Indian Yogashastra, a mode of austere devotion, which involves penance-punishing one's body by standing on one leg or holding up arms or inhaling smoke in an inverted pose, etc. during contemplation. Hatha Yogis regularly practice 'Waman Kriya' (artificially induced vomiting) to cleanse the body of cough and bile. It is supposed to keep the digestive system clean. Waman Kriya has to be regularly practiced as it involves contracting and relaxing the abdominal muscles. There are several steps of this process too.

The fake Swamis gulp a Shiva ling before the performance. A little before the commencement of the programme they drink salty water and as the programme proceeds they contract and relax their abdominal muscles in the specific manner so as to bring up the salty water throwing out the Shiva ling along with it. This again is certainly not producing the ling anew but only taking out what was gulped in previously. But the gullible devotees, much impressed by the act, are convinced that the Swami is blessed by the 'Bholanath Shiva Shankar'. By the way 'Bholanath' literally means a 'Lord of the artless and simple'; and the devotees who can be deceived easily prove to be so. No wonder they are

easily duped by the sanctimonious pretenders and become their blind followers. Of course such Hatha Yogi Swamis who bring up a Shiva ling from their stomach are very rarely found. Most of the professional Swamis take the easier path described earlier.

Satya Sai Baba performed the 'miracle' of producing a Shiva ling from his mouth year after year in his Ashram. Smart people detected the trickery in this programme and one rationalist organization from Anantpur, began performing the 'miracle' regularly in front of large audiences with great success. Many Babas and Buvas too regularly produced Shiva ling from their mouths on the Mahashivaratri days. The programme became so familiar that the startling surprise evoked by it disappeared altogether, so much so, that Satya Sai Baba had to give up his divine miracle of producing a Shiva ling for quite a while.

Any phenomenon that cannot be explained by natural laws, at the first sight, is considered a miracle. It automatically gets surrounded by an aura of divine manifestation. However as the phenomenon is examined, applying scientific criteria, the mystery vanishes, the divine aura fades away and it becomes a common place phenomenon. Satya Sai Baba who claimed to have acquired supernatural divine powers, performed a number of miracles like waving his hand in the air and getting holy ashes, gold chains, etc., out of nowhere, taking out various articles from an empty bag and creating the words Sai Baba out of flowers strewn on the floor. But a newly trained 'magician' too can repeat all these acts with equal dexterity, in front of an audience of thousands. He in addition also explains to the audience the sleight of hand that makes the so called miracles possible. After all the tricks of the Baba are duplicated and the knowledge of the physical phenomena that explain them is revealed to the public, believing adamantly in Baba's supernatural powers is the height of artless simplicity.

Mr. Chitra Venkappa Raju happens to be Satya Sai Baba's uncle. He is a professional magician of Andhra Pradesh. Satya Sai Baba learned this art from his uncle while the Baba was still studying in school and performed the tricks he learnt from his uncle in the school programmes. At the age of 20, Baba declared that he was the incarnation of the Sai Baba of Shirdi, a town in the State of Maharashtra. From here onwards he started performing his magical art claiming that he had acquired supernatural divine powers that enable him to perform miracles. There was no dearth of devotees who, impressed by his 'miracles' had complete faith in him. His miracle mongering programmes included making things like holy ashes, rings, etc. materialize from thin air into his hands;

and also producing a Shiva ling out of his mouth. Several people from various walks of life challenged his miracle mongering and the claim of divine role in it. But Baba dodged them all quite successfully.

Defiance of the investigating team

The then vice chancellor of the Bangalore University Dr. H. Narasimhaiah was keen to investigate Baba's claims of divinity and his so called miracles. He, therefore, formed a committee for 'Investigation into the Truth about Miracles'. The committee requested Baba for a meeting with him for verifying the reality of his miracles. Baba did not reply; he did not even acknowledge the letters and reminders sent to him by the committee. Instead he abused the University of Bangalore and the investigating Committee and declared that no power on earth has the right to investigate him. Many rationalists from all over the country thereafter made another attempt to meet the Baba in 1986. They gathered in Bangalore, hired busses and proceeded to Puttaparthi to meet the Baba. Their objective was to sit in "Dharana" in front of his Ashram, and challenge him either to prove his supernatural power or to give up his performances of miracles. But they did not succeed, for, the Andhra Pradesh Government stopped them from going further as they could have created a law and order problem! Satya Sai Baba continued with his Miracles with impunity!

It is not that Baba's miracle mongering could not be challenged successfully. He had been exposed and made to bite the dust, a few times. On such occasions Baba got furious but had to accept defeat. Here is one episode when Sai Baba was outwitted. The world famous magician P.C. Sarkar (junior) went to meet Sai Baba on one occasion. Sai Baba did not recognize him and to impress him, closed his empty palm into a fist and a Rudraksha materialized when he opened his fist. Sarkar promptly repeated Baba's act and took out a Rasgulla from his empty palm and offered it to Saibaba. This guest who proved more than a match for the Baba was immediately shown the door by Baba's attendants. Another episode, comparatively recent, that thoroughly exposed Baba's trickery at Kalyan Mandapam. At the opening ceremony of this edifice built by Sai Baba trust, Baba felicitated the Architect, in the presence of many dignitaries by presenting a gold chain to him. The chain, of course had materialized from thin air into Baba's hand. (No need, incidentally, to keep any account of valuable things that materialize in this manner.) But to the ill luck of the Baba, he was caught on a film while receiving the chain from one of his attendants. It was being passed on to him under a trey, unnoticed by the audience. Baba was not aware of the camera that

could film him from behind! The film strip, showing the chain being passed, was immediately passed on to the national TV channel of Andhra Pradesh and inadvertently telecast. It surely was promptly withdrawn when the blunder was noticed by the authorities. But by then many people had seen it; moreover, many copies of the film strip were made and distributed to rationalist organizations before the original was confiscated. The Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti of Maharashtra and Goa both has a copy of it. Baba's magic mongering did not stop even after this.

Here one cannot refrain from comparing this Modern Baba with our great Swami Vivekanand. Swami Vivekanand after giving his famous speech to the congregation of all religions in America was pressed by the audience to perform a miracle, the irritated Swami bluntly rebuked, "I refuse to indulge in Miracle mongering. Moreover, I believe that even if some mind boggling incidents take place around us, all those incidents can happen only according to natural laws. The magician's sleight of hand makes them look like miracles. Wise people stay away from such trickery." Again, Mahatma Gandhi who took pride in being a Sanatan Hindu never adored any Baba or never sought any Baba's blessings. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru too, who built up the Indian democracy out of the chaos left here by the British never visited any Buva, Maharaj, Mantrik or Bhagawan but turned his back towards them.

Our present leaders, on the contrary, beg for blessings from the miracle mongering Babas and stay in their Ahrams. By this act of theirs they enhance the Baba's status and the common people imitate them. This picture is dismal and very painful for a rationalist to stomach.

28 April, 2004



Crime and Punishment

We have to condemn publicly the very idea that some people have the right to repress others. In keeping silent about evil, in burying it so deep within us that no sign of it appears on the surface, we are implanting it, and it will rise up thousandfold in the future. When we neither punish nor reproach evildoers.... we are ripping the foundations of justice from beneath new generations.

ALEXANDER SOLTZENITSYN

Beware of Bapu!

Mr. Das is an upper middle class man, living a comfortable retired life. He has just returned home to his bungalow with a garden around, feeling fresh, after his morning walk. His servant brings him a hot cup of tea which makes him all the more fresh. He sits in his easy chair and switches on a cassette of his favourite singer, Kumar Gandharva. With Kumar's voice ringing in his ear he is virtually in a trance when the irritating phone brought him down to earth. It was his elder sister, Akka telling him, 'Bapu's Paduka (wooden slippers or impression of a foot on stone to be worshiped) have already reached here last night from Mumbai.'

Mr. Das, somewhat annoyed, 'Okay, what's next?'

Akka, 'the pooja of Bapu's Paduka will take place tonight at our bungalow. Scores of devotees are expected to arrive for the pooja and Arati (waving a platter with camphor, frankincense, lamp, etc. before a deity, a person or Paduka as in this case). All that I expect you to do is to arrive here in time for the Arati. And don't forget to bring a cheque of Rs. 2000/-with you. As a retired Regional Manager of a Nationalized Bank, you ought to give away at least this much. Worship of the Paduka, is nothing less than worshiping the supreme god.'

In the midst of this hallowed conversation on the phone, Mr. Das was still trying to pick up some heavenly note in Kumar's singing and Kumar's famous 'Komal Gandhar' (the third primary ascending note) touched a chord in his heart. In a tender voice he said, 'Akka, right now I am experiencing divine revelation through Kumar's rendition. Moreover in these beautiful environs of Sakhali I have my favorite deity Datta whom I can worship whenever I want. Where is the need for one more god? Please, I beg your pardon.' He put the receiver down and was immersed once again in Kumar's divine notes.

Prescribing rituals to get rid of illness

Mr. Das who flatly refused to donate anything for the worship of Bapu's Paduka, despite his affluence is a very rare exception. Generally people do donate even if they cannot afford to do so. They will borrow, if need be, but give away at least Rs.500/- They honestly believe that this much is the minimum they ought to sacrifice for their Bapu.

A common middle class person, be he an employee or be he a small businessman, generally has a Guru, a Maharaj, who, he believes, can solve all his problems if he devotedly goes through all the rituals that his Guru tells him to do. His problems may or may not be solved. His prayers may or may not be answered but he continues performing the prescribed rituals and offering service to his Guru or Baba or Maharaj. The Bapu about whom the above episode is narrated is a very popular modern Guru, not an aged swaggerer or a conceited professor but a youthful guy called Aniruddha Joshi.

Dr. Aniruddha Joshi is a surgeon with an M.D. degree. Till quite recently he was working in the Nayar Hospital in Mumbai. He gave up this job of a surgeon for several reasons and started his private practice in Karjat. While discussing the illness of his patients, he started talking about spirituality and religious rituals. He began telling his patients, 'You are down with a serious illness; an ordinary doctor won't be able to cure you. I alone can cure you; for, I am the only doctor with a divine spirit stirring in his heart. But you will have to perform some religious rituals for that.' The patients, who are already drained out and tired of their illness, are prepared to do practically anything that the doctor suggests to them, in the hope of getting rid of their stubborn ailment. So Dr. Joshi's patients readily agreed to perform all the religious rituals he suggested.

Dr. Joshi has a big repertoire of rituals and could recommended different rituals for different people- like fasting for seven Tuesdays to one, fasting for seven Thursdays to another and so on. The rituals did not involve much expense, but a comparatively small amount of 2 to 2.5 thousands. Patients did not mind parting with that much money and willingly handed it to the doctor. Gradually, Dr. Joshi became famous in Karjat and its vicinity and even beyond it. With fame came the riches. In the meanwhile, some devotee of the Sai Baba of Shirdi published Baba's biography. In this book, the writer declared that the Sai Baba of Shirdi is reincarnated as Aniruddha Joshi. So a huge number of Sai devotees turned to this new living incarnation-Dr. Aniruddha Joshi who now became a mini-Sai Baba. Now he not only claims to be the reincarnation

of Sai Baba but also that he is Parabrahma Swaroop (of the nature of universal spirit and substance).

What a Paradox!

An institution called 'Sai Samarth Vidnyan Prabodhini' (an institution for enlightenment by spreading scientific knowledge), is established in the name of 'Reincarnation of Sai Baba'. Its official manifesto states that the main aims of this institution are: 1) spreading and propagating 'Saidnyan' and 2) Eradicating superstition.

The contents of the manifesto are: “the Parabrahma Sadguru (Supreme Lord and excellent guru/spiritual instructor) has manifested himself in Aniruddha Bapu. Sadguru Bapu being Hridayasthan Poornabrahma (identified with Brahma as Brahma abides in his breast - whatever that means) can sense what is going on in the minds of the devotees and manifest himself as Shriram, Shrivishnu, Shrikrishna, Shrihanumanta, Shrisai, Shripandurang and Shri Swami Samartha before them. He can fathom several past births of his devotees as well as non-devotees. He guides them in accordance with the devotees' devotion and their Karmagati (destiny). Let us worship him and lay our minds full of devotion at his feet.”

The manifesto also contains Aniruddha Bapu's commands, in the name of Sai Baba, as to what should Bapu's devotees do. In these commands Bapu says, “my tomb will fulfill your wishes, be steadfast with your mind fixed on me.” Through this message Sainath Maharaj is assuring every devotee, “my beloved child, vow whatever you wish, tell me all that you want. But if you want your wishes to be fulfilled, you have to first vow that you will always remain steadfast in your devotion to Shri Sadguru. Such a vow is most dear to me.” With this vow the devotee pledges himself completely.

Bapu is a devotee of Vyankatesh (a god, incarnation of Lord Krishna worshiped in Karnatak). Bapu worships him with great pomp and show. On the stage there is a huge image of Lord Vyankatesh of Thirupathi . Two drums, five feet tall, are placed before the image. These drums are meant to collect donations. Devotees put the amount that they want to give into these drums. Adjacent to these drums is a Kund (huge square-mouthed metal pot containing water). This is called Pampoksha Kund (a Kund that helps one get rid of his sins). A devotee perambulates around this Kund with a brick on his head. Bigger the number of perambulations, faster is the speed of cleansing the sins. Near the pulpit from where Bapu addresses his devotees, a huge stock of Bapu's books and pamphlets

propagating his message is kept. There is no fixed price for any booklet or other articles. A pen with Bapu's photo is easily sold for Rs. 300/-. Leaders of all parties pay homage to Bapu and attend on him in his court.

'Brahma Satya Jagan Mithya' (the famous statement of Adya Shankaracharya meaning, 'Brahma alone is true, all else is illusory'); the world in which we live is unsubstantial, the condition of present life is determined by the sum total of sins and merits of the past births and such other thoughts have become a part of our psyche. So we have imbibed the attitude of acceptance without any complaint; the message, 'be satisfied with your lot- with whatever is granted you by your destiny' has wiped out our desire to live, eradicated our aspiration to rise above the wretched conditions with our own efforts. At the same time, however, we have retained an insatiable desire to use all the consumerist amenities that modern science has made available to us. We live a life that is increasingly becoming surreal and shiftless all at once. Indians, once upon a time, were known to be vanguards of progress and knowledge, whereas, today we are turning completely fatalist; we blindly accept doctrines and dogmas propagated by self-seeking Buvas and Babas and Maharaj. We look up to these Buvas and Babas as our saviors who can make or break our lives because we have lost confidence in our own ability. What we really need is a scientific outlook which no Baba or Buva or any spiritualist is capable of conferring on us. Aniruddha Bapu is no exception; better beware of him!

9 May, 2004



Good Social System: A Need of the Hour

"You can not have good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor can you be fit to exercise political rights and privileges unless your social system is based on reason and justice. You cannot have a good economic system when your social arrangements are imperfect. If your religious ideals are low and groveling you cannot succeed in social, economic and political spheres. This interdependence is not an accident but the law of our nature. Like the member of our body you cannot have strength in hands and feet if your internal organs are in disorder. What is applied to human body holds good of the collective humanity we call society or state."

M. G. RANADE

Truth and Falsehood of Hallow

Recently we had a guest, an erudite scholar from Pune. He was teaching philosophy and logic for a long time in a college in Pune. He had also written a few books on both these subjects. He had a great pride in the spiritual traditions of India and was a follower of some spiritual sect and was a great devotee of its leader. During our conversation after lunch, he began extolling the Maharaj of his sect. He said, 'Rambhau, I have no words to extol our Sadguru Mauli-(great guru as compassionate as a mother). He can discern precisely what goes on in other people's minds. He is truly an Antaradnyani (one who knows intuitively what passes in the world).'

'It is too hard to believe, sir.' I responded politely. My remark obstructed the drift of his articulate adoration of the Maharaj. He seemed to be a bit annoyed. Ignoring his annoyance I pushed myself forward, 'Sir, we can only guess what might be going on in other's mind; but I don't think we can find out precisely what the other person thinks.'

The Professor would not let me continue. He butted in, 'Our Maharaj had achieved this ability. You will be utterly surprised; he knew what his friend, settled in USA was thinking and communicated with him from India. Mind you, he did not use any of your modern gimmicks like telephones or fax machines!'

'Pardon me Sir, but have you ever tried to verify any of his claims?' I ventured to ask him. He was somewhat taken a back. However, gathering his wits quickly he said, 'Of course, I did not verify these claims. But I know many highly regarded men who have extolled his unbelievable spiritual power and vouch for it. You rationalists always commit one mistake and that is your insistence on verifying issues of Antaradnyan (knowing about the world intuitively) on criteria stipulated by science.'

'Yes, exactly.' said I.

'But, my dear fellow, you must remember one thing. Such phenomena are not amenable to criteria of scientific analysis. They are far beyond your modern science laboratories and scientific thinking.' This comment of his said it all. Any further argument with him was worthless. So I decided to keep quiet.

But encouraged by my silence, he became more aggressive and said, 'Once you accept the existence of mystic powers and abilities you are able to solve many puzzles. Our Maharaj has 'Tejovalay'-(Aura - a kind of orbit emanating light around him.) Many saints are supposed to bear such an aura. Our Maharaj should be counted as one of them. What a mighty spiritual force! ... etc., etc.' he went on and on.

In all cultures and in all periods of history some people claim to possess the ability to communicate with people far away, which is not possible with our normal sense organs. This ability is believed to be related to religious Mantra-Tantra (charms and spells) or with obscure occult Sciences. It was not paid much attention till the latter half of the 19th century. In 1882 however the 'Society for Psychical Research' was founded in England. A similar Institution, 'American Society for Psychical Research' was established in 1887 in America. Many other countries founded their own institutions and started investigating the strange occult sciences. Many highly regarded intellectuals and scientists participated in the research projects of these institutions. A few Universities also supported the investigation of spiritual-psychic occurrences.

One of the four components of this subject under investigation was Telepathy. It means the communication of one mind with another without using speech, hearing, sight or any other sense normally used to communicate or any other known mechanism of communication. Investigation into telepathy started with great earnest.

To begin with, the investigation was mainly of personal experiences. In the personal experiences of telepathy, when investigated, many links between the two communicators were discovered. In case of some people who claimed to possess telepathic ability, it was noticed that the allied information had been conveyed to them in advance. In some cases it was simply a chance occurrence while a few others were plain hoax. How to examine these cases was a big problem before the investigators. Finally Joseph Banks Rhine, an investigator of Extrasensory Perception (ESP), came to their rescue. His tests were based on cards. (It is not possible, in this short essay, to explain the method J. B. Rhine used in his

tests.) Even after several repeated tests, the genuineness of telepathy could not be established.

In the end, the national research society of America arrived at the conclusion that research in ESP, which includes telepathy, cannot be recognized. The spiritualists still maintain that an aura glows around great persons. In fact there is an aura around every person and that aura, some believe, tells a lot about the individual's health status. This, too, has been investigated. Serious intense investigation revealed that even lifeless objects possess an aura. After this the Aura glowing round spiritual Gurus loses all its glory.

18 Oct, 2005



Reason and Politics

It may perhaps be agreed that the first requisite for scientific reasoning is a regard for truth, and as politics as practiced at present has nothing to do with truth. It is better for scientific writers to leave politics out of consideration. This would be correct argument if it was assumed that the truth is undesirable in politics, as some politicians will certainly openly assert, and the others will prove by their conduct that they agree with this opinion for all practical purposes.

Even if some rationalists may seriously take the view that since means have to be adopted to ends, it is quite legitimate to cheat your enemies in the time of war and since nobody can say when war will break out, it may be considered legitimate at all times even if this is not always considered as a preparation for aggressive war, but simply as a defensive measure against wily enemies.

R. D. KARVE

Baba-Buvas and Leaders Mutual Backscratching Club

A news flashed just the day before that the Prime Minister, a popular leader, known for his integrity and a poetic disposition, Shri Atal Buhari Bajpei met with Satyasaibaba. The meeting is likely to spread a wrong message among the people.

In the daily, 'Tarun Bharat' of 12th February, news of the Prime Minister meeting with Satyasaibaba in his 'Prashanti Nilayam' ashram was published along with their photos. Two months back, the nightingale of India, Lata Mangeshkar and Babasaheb Purandare, the present day minstrel of Shivaji Maharaj were both awarded 'Jeevan Gaurav Purskar' (award for lifelong contribution in some field) by the Narendra Maharaj Sansthan. This news was, of course, flashed in all news papers. Our honorable vice President Bhairasimha Shekavhat graced the occasion by his presence. A year before, our honorable President, A.P.J. Kalam attended the convocation ceremony of an educational institution run by Satyasaibaba. It's a well known fact that the erstwhile prime Minister of India, Shri Narasimha Rao had very good relations with the spiritual leader, Chandraswami.

The list can be extended ad infinitum. But the issue here is, should or shouldn't our revered leaders in politics and other fields reach out to these religious and spiritual luminaries and lean before them? Of course, there is nothing wrong in meeting and leaning before saints who are great socio-religious leaders. Two such memorable historical meetings are cited. One, when Shivachhatrapati the Maratha warrior king- went to the abode of Sant Tukaram and two when he went to meet Samarth Ramdas. Minstrels still dotingly sing about these meetings. That is because both Sant Tukaram and Samarth Ramdas had spotlessly clean characters. Both were simple and kindhearted. There was nothing objectionable for a king in meeting such saintly men. But are Chandra swami, Satyasaibaba

and Narendra Maharaj as spotlessly clean as Sant Tukaram and Samarth Ramdas? No, they are not, despite their numerous devout admirers. Here are some facts about the Swami, the Baba and the Maharaj that go to support my argument.

Character of Swami, Baba and Maharaj

The Tantric Swami- Chandra swami- formerly was called Nemida Gandhi. Giving up his education he went to the Bihar-Uttar Pradesh forests. There, it is said, he became Aghormargi and learned the practices of that order. (Aghormarg is an order of vagrant mendicants who practice abominable and revolting rites.) This Aghormargi then metamorphosed into the present Tantric Chandra swami. In 1972, the swami came in contact with Narasinha Rao, our earlier Prime Minister who brought him to Delhi. With the backing of Narasinha Rao he went abroad and established contacts with many foreign high ranking officials and influential businessmen. One of these men was the biggest armaments dealer Adnan Khashshogi. Chandra swami owns a huge four storied palatial Ashram in Delhi, replete with all modern amenities. His influence increased by the day and soon he was a big gun. His devotees include presidents and prime ministers, Hollywood actors and actresses and many other influential people.

Satyasaibaba too, like Chandra swami, is a dubious but highly influential character. Even at the tender age of 14 years he was bold enough to declare himself to be the incarnation of Saibaba of Shirdi. His miracle mongering too, started at this age, when he used to pull out holy ashes from thin air, a Shiva ling from his mouth and cure devotees transferring their illness on to himself. (But he consistently refused to accept challenges to his miracles from all quarters.) A few years back his own devotees in the Ashram attacked him. The Baba had to run and hide himself in the toilet. Later his assailants were locked up in a room; police were called in to shoot them. All the assailants were killed.

We next turn to another Maharaj, viz. the Narendra Maharaj. He was earlier Jagadeesh Surve, from Naneej. He entered Government service as a Gramsevak. For some reason he had to give up this job and set out on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur-Shegaon. On his return to Naneej he planted a sampling of the Peepul tree and began guiding people in spirituality. Within a short period of 5/6 years, Jagadeesh Surve got transformed into a new Avatar-the Narendra Maharaj. He started giving sermons from the Naneej hill, counseling people and solving their problems. There was no dearth of devotees who began gathering there on the 2nd Saturday of every

month. The collection in the coffers of the Maharaj easily ran into two to three lack rupees on that day. The Maharaj boasts that the wellbeing of the world is in his hands. However his dubious speeches rubbish all these loud claims.

An Open Letter

Every well settled Baba-Buva -Maharaj claims to have acquired the spiritual power that enables him to dispel the grief of their devotees and bring bliss to them and to the world; but such a claim invariably proves empty. Pretending to have attained great spiritual power or divine abilities is an ingredient of the Buvabaji trade (con business of Baba-Buva-Maharaj); and is essential for mesmerizing gullible people and pulling them into their own fold. One has to be watchful about their pretense. Compare these pretentious Baba-Buvas with the real saintly men who although few in number have a lasting effect on society. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, called himself a Sanatani Hindu (believing in the Eternal Hindu Religion); but he never met with any religious leader and never paid obeisance to any Baba-Buva-Maharaj in his life. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, though not a religious or spiritual saint, was the maker of India's destiny. But he did not allow any of these pretenders in his vicinity.

Times have completely changed now. Today, many influential political leaders hasten to meet their Baba or Buva to beg for blessings, with no regard for any bounds of etiquettes and protocols. As mentioned earlier the most Honorable President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam recently graced the inauguration ceremony of an educational Institution run by Satyasaibaba. The presence of the president at a function organized by a Baba of dubious repute gives a wrong message to people. Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, President of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (ANS) wrote a letter to the President to express the grief caused by his wrong message. The gist of the letter follows:

“... We are an organization struggling to propagate Scientific Outlook for the last 15 years. This letter is to express the deep anguish caused by your presence at Satyasaibaba's function. You are a great scientist and well aware that nurturing scientific outlook is the duty of every citizen of this country as per the constitution of India. Inculcating Scientific Outlook is an important core constituent of education and is included in the 'value education' content of the schools in Maharashtra. Again, you are well aware, that Scientific Outlook and miracle relate to each other in the same way that light and darkness do.

“... Saibaba of Puttaparthi has been performing miracles continuously for the last 50 years. He explicitly declares that god has bestowed this power of making miracles on him. However he never allows any scientific investigation of his claim. Since miracles are impossible according to Scientific Outlook, miracle mongering of Satya Saibaba is a fraud and moral degradation. The presence of an eminent scientist like you, at the convocation ceremony of Satyasaibaba's Institution not only gives a wrong message to the public but also boosts up Buvabaji (the con business of Baba-Buvas). It is publicly known that Satyasaibaba has been accused of homo-sexual misbehavior by many of his long time devotees, just two years back. Awakened by this scandal the UNESCO has withdrawn its co-sponsorship for many educational programmes organized by Saibaba's institutions. Saibaba Ashram has not bothered to give any explanation for it. Again, a few years back five very steadfast devotees of Baba made an attempt on his life. Four of them were locked in a room, shot at point blank range and killed by the police. This created a lot of public anger and the news papers made a loud clamor about it. But the matter seems to have been hushed up, for, even the initial inquiry report has not come out so far. The meeting of the eminent scientist and the honorable President of this cultured Indian Nation with a person of such dubious reputation has caused much pain to all of us in the Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti. In the name of the Social Reformists of Maharashtra, may we request you to refrain from attending any Buvabaji boosting functions in the future?”

“Yours faithfully,

Narendra Dabholkar.”

As mentioned in the beginning, just the day before another very painful news that Shri Atal Bihari Bajpei, our Prime Minister and popular leader known for his integrity and poetic disposition, visited Puttaparthi Ashram to meet with Satyasaibaba. Hence this protest giving vent to the feelings of rationalists in India

24 Feb, 2004



Tomb that Rose Out of the Floor!

We come across innocent, simple people wherever we go. But quite often a few of these innocent looking men and even women are professional swindlers. I came across such a person recently. I was travelling in a bus which was not at all crowded. The seat adjacent to mine was unoccupied. A fellow traveler sitting nearby came and sat on the empty seat. With a smiling face he greeted me, 'Namaskar Sahib.' He tried to be familiar. After engaging me in small talk for a while, he came to the point. He put two very old coins on my hand and related how he got hold of them. His story, that turned out to be a made up one follows, as he narrated it to me.

This man had come from Madhya Pradesh in search of a job. He was able to get a job as a supervisor on some mine. He had about 40 labourers working under him. While digging, the workers found a copper vessel. The honest labourers despite their poverty handed the vessel to this supervisor. When he opened the lid, he found, to his great surprise, a number of old coins of great value in it. The two coins he gave me were from this treasure.

Giving the coins to me he pleaded, 'See, Sir we are poor people coming from a distant land. If the coins are stolen goods, I will come to harm for no reason.' I observed the coins minutely. They were Surati (from Surat, a prosperous city in Gujarat) Rupees, made of pure silver and were worth at least three times their face value. With much intimacy he whispered in my ears, 'Sir, just grab them. You just have to nod and I will bring the whole vessel for you. I promise to accept whatever deal you are prepared to make.' I refrained from accepting his offer immediately. While reflecting on his offer, it struck me that there was a gang of sharp people roaming around whose business it was to spy out simple and gullible middle class people; show them genuine and valuable old coins and later trick them into buying many fake coins. Was

this man a member of this gang? I wondered. In reply to his request about the deal, I told him, 'let us both go to the Police Station in Mhapsa (in Goa); with the help of the police we can verify whether the coins are genuine.' The fellow, who intended to accompany me right up to Mhapsa, quickly got down at the next stop, never to return to continue his journey.

These sharp people have a repertoire of tricks for defrauding gullible individuals of their money and valuable belongings. Some time back a gang of scoundrels was around pretending to detect presence of idols, buried in the earth long, long ago. They claimed to have acquired supernatural power with which they could detect where exactly a hidden idol could be unearthed. They obliged many gullible people exhuming hidden idols from their lands extracting a lot of money from them. The modus operandi of this gang was as follows:

To begin with, they locate a tree standing in a particular direction of an open sterile plain. One member of the gang digs a pit at the bottom of the tree and buries an idol there without being noticed. About a few months later a rumour of a 'divine appearance of the deity enshrined in the buried idol' in the dream of someone from the gang, is spread around with much publicity and hype. Then on one fine day, 50-60 people from the surrounding area are gathered and in the presence of all the spectators the hidden idol is unearthed. There is no real Divine Appearance, no mystic power or no godly force involved here. It is purely the machination of the crooks.

A very similar event, deceiving credulous susceptible people, was pulled off in Bangani (a town in the Sangli district). Of special notice in this case is the fact that this fraud was perpetrated by a woman. She lived in the Momin Moholla (Momins' settlement) with her family. In this town, long back, there lived a saintly Muslim Jalaluddin Sahib. His devotees built a tomb for him in the cemetery in the outskirts of the town. Many people used to visit the tomb of this saint in the cemetery. One day, this woman, Adaboon (for, that was her name) told a few people that the floor of the middle room of her house was severed and a tomb of Jalaluddin Sahib emerged from the ground. The rumour spread like wild fire in the town and in villages around. People hastened to visit the divine miraculous occurrence. When asked about the Tomb, Adaboonbai used to tell them, 'in the night Sahib appeared to me in a divine vision and said, "My child you are very pious. I am going to bless you with a divine favour. My tomb will manifest itself in the middle room of your house. Take care of it and also treat all devotees that come to see it with respect. May you be happy and blissful hereafter."' The divine vision came true

and next morning, to my surprise, the floor was severed and a tomb emerged out in the middle room. All this is His blessings.' At the end of the story Adaboonbai used to fold her hands looking towards the sky.

A brass lamp and an earthen lamp were lighted in front of the tomb. Pooja was offered to it and a green bed sheet was spread over it. Illumination added to the pomp and show in the room. Adaboon claimed that all these accessories emerged out of the earth along with the tomb. The whole town was agog with this news. But many youngsters refused to believe the woman's story. They had their doubt but could not openly challenge it as most people in the town believed that it was a miracle of their religion. Expressing any doubt amounts to blasphemy in such cases. The youth of the town had become restless but had to keep quiet. The crowds eager to witness the miracle gathered in ever larger numbers. Controlling the traffic of Auto-rickshaws and Tempos became difficult; traffic police had to be called from the Taluka Police Station. The police came and controlled the traffic and the crowd but did not interfere with the miracle mongering nor did anybody from the town raise the issue with them. But there was one courageous teacher who was also an activist of a progressive movement. This activist, Sanjay Bansode by name, was interested in journalism also. He went to Adaboon's house along with some ten co-activists and tried to persuade Adaboon, 'See, Bai, a tomb arising out of the earth is a miracle.'

'Correct', said Adaboon enthusiastically, 'that's what has happened in my house.'

'But Bai, such miracles don't happen in reality', said Sanjay raising his voice, 'you must tell me what really happened here.'

'I am not lying, my brother. The tomb literally severed the floor and emerged along with all these accessories.' Said Adaboon and the other members of the family present there supported her claims.

Sanjay now realized that Adaboon, the shrewd woman firmly backed by her family is not going to relent easily. Next day, in the meeting called by the Sarpanch (head of a five member assembly of arbitration in a small town or village), Sanjay opened the topic. 'My friends', he said, 'our saints and scholars have always opposed miracle mongering. We know that miracles do not happen. The claim of any occurrence of miracle is made by people either out of ignorance or deliberately because their interest is vested in it. It is these interested people who perpetrate the fraud. We must get an explanation of the Tomb in Adaboon's house.' This suggestion was accepted by all members who

then proceeded to Adaboon's house along with the Sarpanch.

Reaching there, the Sarpanch told her, 'See Adaboonbai, you may keep telling us that the tomb severed the earth and emerged out of it; but none of us believes your lies. We are sure all this is nothing but a fraud. Now tell us who did it and why.' 'Sarpanch Sahib, this is a miracle', Adaboonbai kept replaying the old record. Finally Sanjay drew out his unfailing weapon, the threat of police complaint and said, 'Bai, before coming here, I had been to the Police Station and registered a complaint against you that you have claimed a miracle that is simply impossible and are now deceiving poor gullible people. The Police will arrive here any minute and arrest you.' Sanjay's weapon proved very effective. The terrified Adaboonbai relented and told the whole story about the tomb. She started begging them, 'Sahib, please forgive me and stop the police from arresting me. I will tell you the truth. Members of our family built the tomb. We were seeking fame and riches. Our neighbours also helped us in creating this racket.'

Police were called in. They arrested Adaboonbai accusing her of deceiving people.

17 Oct, 2004



Fraud and Fake

If a paranormalist could really give a properly researched demonstration of telepathy (precognition, psychokinesis, reincarnation, perpetual motion, whatever it is) he would be the discoverer of a totally new principle, unknown to physical science. The discoverer of the new energy field that links mind to mind in telepathy, or of the new fundamental force that moves objects without trickery around a tabletop, deserves a Noble prize, and would probably get one. If you are in possession of this revolutionary secret of science why waste it on gimmicky television entertainment? Why not prove it properly and be hailed as the new Notion? Of course, we know the real answer. You can't do it, You are a fake. But thanks to gullible or cynical television producers, a well-healed fake....!

RICHARD DAWKINS
(Unweaving the Rainbow)

Installing Idols

Swindlers' Business

A stranger used to visit us once a year to collect contributions to a fund for building a temple. He came once again this morning and leisurely squatted on the sofa. This was his fourth consecutive visit. Smiling like a thick acquaintance of ours, he said, 'last night I had a divine appearance in my dream. Lord Krishna came and told me that you will donate at least 200 rupees for this cause. So the first thing in the morning, I prepared a receipt for that amount and hurried to visit you. Here is the receipt.' Giving him tit for tat, I promptly replied, 'last night, I too had a divine vision of Shriram in my dream. He told me, you must drive away the first visitor who turns up to meet you tomorrow morning. Don't fail to do so, for therein lies your good. Now despite Shri Ram Prabhu's command I will not drive you away empty handed but give you a rupee and request you to leave immediately.' And I put a rupee coin in his hand. He threw the coin away and left immediately fretting and fuming, never to come back.

The Bluff of Divine Vision

Very few donation collectors would ever have to face an experience narrated above. And very few people could escape from being caught in the net of words like- divine vision or deities appearing in dreams and giving commands spread by such wily donation seekers. A common man, generally being credulous, would quickly hand over 200 rupees to the impostor, take the receipt and close the chapter.

Collecting contributions to raise funds in the name of installing an idol or building a temple or some such thing has become a very profitable business these days. Take the example of the gentleman in the above episode. This fellow from some other town was a regular visitor to all of us in the colony. His intension, as he told it, was to build a temple to Lord

Shri Krishna in his own town. The amount that he had so far collected was so small that he never would have been able to build the said temple. Yet the appeal for donation that he had in print included names of three very influential persons in bold letters. The receipt book too was quite attractively printed on glazed paper! The fact was that he was fully aware of his inability and in fact, had no intention whatsoever of building a temple in the first place. He was fleecing gullible devout people to guarantee a leisurely life in fun and frolic, for himself.

Tricks of these Burly Fellows

These sharp people use many tricks to defraud innocent people of their money. They call you their munificent protectors on whose unstinting support they wholly depend; they tickle your ego by flattery; they make a receipt of a large amount in your name before you are aware of it and then coax you to part with that amount which is becoming of your bighearted generosity; they show concern for you and your family and enquire about them; they also try to put pressure on you using the name of some political big wig (all the better if that political big wig happens to be a lady); and if all this fails to work, they gather a few burly fellows not known to you, enter your house forcibly with them and take away all the money they can find. 'The divine mission of installing and consecrating an idol is only a pretence to rouse religious feelings of pious people. The real objective is the same as narrated in the episode above, i.e., grabbing money from others for one's own leisurely life. People from Goa are now accustomed to these tactics of the unscrupulous parasites.

Mandur Episode

As though all this is not enough, these parasites have adopted a new trick. They now use the names of some revered spiritual persons. This is revealed in the recently exposed episode that took place in Mandur. Let us see what happened there in Dongari-Mandur. As usual some sharp people founded a committee for organizing a ceremony of installing and consecrating a statue of Satyasaibaba. This committee was called, 'Saibaba Moorti Sthapana Ceremony committee'. This committee got very attractive brochures printed and started collecting donations from people through their agents. This news was flashed in the daily "Gamantak" issues of 24th to 26th October. It also said that in the brochure the committee has named the Peethadheesh (head of the seat) Brahmeshananda Swami Maharaj of Haturli and some other eminent personalities without their prior permission. According to the brochure, a

number of programmes were to be executed during the period 24th to 26th October. In practice however not a single programme has so far been executed. The Haturli Peethadheesh Swami Brahmeshananda has taken a serious notice of this incident which, he is convinced, is a fraud to collect huge amounts of money using his and other peoples' names; and also that installment of Saibaba's statue is only a pretense. The local followers of the Padmanabha Sampraday (Religious sect of Padmanabh Swami) have approached the police and called on them to investigate into this scam and take adequate action against the rogues. Both these actions-taking serious notice of the scam and approaching the police for taking action against the culprits are commendable and welcome.

The Haturli Peethadheesh Swami Brahmeshananda is a much revered spiritual Guru, whose mentor was the earlier Haturli Peethadheesh, Brahmananda Swami. He passed away recently. The late Brahmananda Swami freed multitudes of Goans from addiction and taught them how to live a spiritual life of bliss, peace and tranquility. This great work of his has created a place of honour and love for him and for his Padmanabha Sampraday in the minds of people in Goa. After his demise the responsibility of furthering the good name and deeds of Haturli Peeth of Padmanabha Sampraday lies on the shoulder of Swami Brahmeshananda who is as revered and loved by Goans as was his mentor late Brahmananda Swami. Brahmeshananda Swami is fulfilling his responsibility with enthusiasm and efficiency. No wonder, people of Goa insist that the gang of rogues that used the name of this pious seat of the saints and the names of their beloved Swamis be brought to book as early as possible. Otherwise this gang emboldened by delay on the part of the police organization will start their nefarious activity of taking gullible people for a ride elsewhere.

Modus Operandi of Temple Building

Temple building isn't a pretense in each and every case of collecting funds. In some instances a temple gets built. But the land where the temple is built is public or Government owned land. Building a temple or a prayer house on Public or government owned land is an outright deception. It has become a regular business of the scoundrels to build temples on government lands in Goa. Theirs is a well planned plot as follows.

To begin with, a small cupola or dome is erected on a piece of government land where many people hang around. After some days a religious programme is arranged in front of the dome. Dignified people

in power and also known in the surrounding area are invited to grace the function. Lunch is served. At the end, the deity i.e. the idol inside the dome is opened for people to see. Gradually people start visiting the dome to have a 'Darshan' of the deity inside. Within a couple of years' time the dome is ready for expansion into a full-fledged temple. Now, this unauthorized building of the temple belongs to a private owner although the land on which it is built is government owned. There are many such temples and prayer houses in Goa. Each of them is a means of earning, which will suffice for the owner's next 40 generations to live a life of ease and comfort without doing any work. The money that gets into the pockets of these pretenders comes from the toil and sweat of the poor gullible masses.

Center of Exploitation

Thus the unauthorized building of the temple becomes a center of exploitation. The Swindlers organize many religious functions and ceremonies to extract money from devout believers. They give regular receipts for the amount received from the devotees. However the money and the temple being owned by the swindlers themselves it goes into their pockets. The simple unwary devotees are exploited. The money is spent on crackers and fireworks too, creating problems of noise and atmospheric pollution. People living in the surrounding area have to suffer the pollution meekly.

Government, it is learnt, is now going to regularize all unauthorized buildings which have been built recently. But only the huts and tiny houses built in the slum areas should get the benefit of this scheme and not the illegally built temples and prayer houses which have become centers of exploiting the poor believers, for it will amount to authorising an illegal business of the scoundrels. Instead legal action should be initiated against builders of unauthorized temples and prayer houses bringing them to book.

20 Nov, 2003



Speech, Sense and Vedas

'Nature has made man markedly different than other animals, bestowing two important gifts on him which it has refrained from giving to other animals. The two gifts are Speech and Sense (or Reason). Sensible speech has become man's distinctive characteristic.' This eloquent statement comes from a renowned stage actor, Dr. Ajay Vaidya. He was speaking at a seminar organized by "Gomantak Sahitya Sevak Mandal" (society of the servants of literature) last month on 29th July. The topic under discussion was "Contribution of Literature".

The statement still lingered in my mind when the thought of another debate, viz. 'the preterhuman nature of the Vedas' struck me. It was a hotly debated topic on which Pundits used to wrangle a lot. The progressive intellectuals argued that the whole Vedic literature is the expression of the profound thoughts of our great sages. It just cannot be 'Devavani' (voice from heaven). On the other hand the orthodox Vedic Pundits, even today, maintain that Vedas are words spoken by God from the heavens; and the communication was received by our sages who wrote every word of it, exactly as He spoke. To resolve the issue in this debate we have to examine what is Speech and what is sensible thinking (reasoning).

The believers maintain that the Ved-Vachans (Vedic statements) are uttered by God himself. Therefore the knowledge that is conveyed through them is the true knowledge or 'Yatharth' knowledge (right or just knowledge) which is not attainable by any worldly means. No one can experience heaven, hell, other world etc. with just human sense organs. The knowledge that 'an individual goes to heaven after death and dwells there; his deeds committed in this birth fructify in his next birth; etc.' can be attained only through Vedic statements. The knowledge of spiritual matters also can be comprehended only through the Ved-Vachan.

This claim of the believers ought to be examined on the touch stone

of reason. The concepts from Indian Philosophy, used for verifying the truth, will be of much use for this examination. They are: Pratyaksha Praman (perceptible testimony or concrete proof), Anuman (inference), Alaukik Shabda (preterhuman words) and Shaabdabodh (semantics or meanings of words). Let us try to understand how these concepts help to verify the truth of any phenomenon.

Pratyaksha Praman and Anuman (direct proof and inference)

Praman is testimony or proof; providing proof is a means of obtaining knowledge that is true beyond doubt. The knowledge that we get through our senses is direct knowledge, knowledge with perceptible testimony. We see things with our eyes; similarly with the other sense organs like nose, tongue, ears, skin we come to know the existence of various things. All this knowledge is direct knowledge and the means with which we get the knowledge are direct means. Let us, now, see what inference is. Many times we hear a loud sound of an explosion somewhere. Within seconds we notice a huge smoke cloud rising up above the horizon. From this we infer that a bomb or something similar has exploded. We cannot see the bomb directly with our own eyes. So to infer that a bomb was there, we need to have previous direct experience of the explosion of a bomb. We must have experienced the loud stunning noise of an explosion earlier. We must have seen the billowing smoke rising up after an explosion sometime in the past. Similarly we also must know that whenever a bomb explodes it is invariably accompanied with ear shattering noise and a huge cloud of smoke; a silent, smokeless bomb explosion is impossible. Thus although inference is not direct knowledge, it is supported by previously acquired direct knowledge.

Articulating 'Words'

In addition to direct proof and inference, the word also is considered a proof. Words convey the knowledge verified as true with direct proof and inference. The word has to be uttered. Uttering a word creates sound. This sound denotes something and is a symbol or exponent of that thing. The particular thing which is denoted by the sound is the meaning of that word. A simple example will explain this better. When we make a sound 'tree' it expounds on the particular object 'tree' and we understand what it means.

Any statement or a meaningful sentence cannot be uttered by any lifeless object. The sentence has to be uttered for conveying some opinion or sense and only a living being can utter it. Naturally the shallow religious thinkers are likely to claim that the Veda-Vachans are

uttered by some non-living (Achetan) power and that power is the omniscient God. But to resort to the support of god, whose very existence is not proved beyond doubt, for uttering the Ved-vachans is ridiculous.

Shriti Vachans are manmade

Shriti Vachans i.e. statements in Vedas are made in chains of words or in a language. How does a language evolve? The research in the fields of anthropology and the theory of evolution is relevant to the genesis of language. The theory of evolution tells us that man evolved from apes and behaved like other animals for a million years thereafter. He did not know any language then. Language evolved very slowly in the passage of time. Different languages evolved in the different parts of the earth. Naturally every object will have different names in different parts of the world. Had language been Dev-Vani, a language of the celestials, language spoken by god, then there should have been only one language for all human beings in all parts of the world. But it is not so. Since there are different names for the same object in different languages, it is clear that language is not an innate instinct like all other natural instincts. This proves that the claims of the believers that Shriti-Vachanas were uttered by god and our sages picked up this voice from the heaven and recorded verbatim entirely what god had to say in the Vedas. (This voice from the heaven is in no way related to 'Akashvani'- the All India Radio. It is like the voice from the heaven, "Oh Kansa, Shrikrishna-the eighth son of Devaki- will kill you' as told in the Mahabharat.)

The believers make another claim just like their claim of veracity of the Vedas. They claim that the knowledge that cannot be attained by means of Pratyaksha Praman and Anuman-direct sense experience and inference- is made available by the Ved-Vachan. But where is the evidence that can prove that the knowledge in the Vedas is true knowledge? This knowledge is not amenable to the secular criteria of direct sense perception and inference. There is no way of determining the veracity of the Vedic concepts like the existence of the world beyond and after death existence, reincarnation according to the sin and merit accumulated in this birth, etc. Where is the proof for the notion that the pious believers reach heaven after death? There is no proof so far. But the believers insist that it ought to be accepted as it is because it is said by the Vedas. In the absence of any means of verifying its authenticity it cannot be accepted as truth. The spiritualists want that people accept the notion of Paralok-the world beyond- trustingly without raising doubts as to whether it exists, because the Vedas say so.

However, it is certainly not wise to accept a notion that cannot be proved to be true, just because the Vedas say so. On the contrary, the fact that the human body rots after death, if not properly disposed of, is a verifiable truth and has no difficulty in being accepted.

28 Aug, 2004



Rationalism

Rationalism is the belief that the world we live in can be understood by the use of Reason. The rationalist argues for a rational approach to human problems, proposes reasoned alternatives to religious dogmas, aims to advance a secular system of education and wishes to defend freedom of thought and civil liberties.

Reason is a tool for solving problems, creating strategies, debunking nonsense and undermining dogmas. However, feeling, compassion and imagination are also important in driving and enriching our actions and thoughts. The strength of reason is that it is a powerful tool of understanding and a means of arriving at rational decisions. Human choices are not always made with complete rationality, but it is preferable to aim for the reasonable than to choose without thought.

The scientific process is powered by the use of reason. Much progress has come through scientific understanding, although the application of science, such as atomic explosions or genetic modification, can sometimes be dangerous. Imagination and empathy enable us to envisage the outcome of the application of science. The arts too can enlarge our concept of being human.

Rationalists have questioned the claims of religious thinkers and religious institutions. They may be agnostics or atheists, but they doubt the claims of the supernatural on the grounds of lack of reasonable evidence. The attitudes and injunctions of religions seem unconvincing when examined in the light of reason.

Rationalists envisage that the use of reason will lead to human progress - even if not in a steady upward course. Rationalists reckon that the sum of human progress may be increased by the careful and consistent use of reason.

R.D. KARVE

What do Dreams Prophecy?

Superstitions of Sushrutsamhita

Ayurved is a science that developed originally in India. The atmosphere of the Indian subcontinent, the material available here, the cycle of the seasons, vegetation, animals and all that form our geographical surroundings along with its culture and outlook on the world make up the foundation in which this Indian science of Ayurved science of medicine and probabilities of life-is rooted. Ayurved has borrowed a few things from the Chinese, Middle East, Greek and Roman cultures. Yet medicine, philosophy, diagnosis and prognosis are all developed independently by the Ayurvedic Scientists. Charak Samhita, Sushrut Samhita, Ashtanga Sangraha and Ashtanga Hridaya are the main ancient tomes, on which rests the Ayurvedic treatment. Out of these tomes, the Sushrut Samhita is known for its innovative and well developed procedures and instruments of surgery that was not known to any other culture of those days. This famous tome has been translated into Latin, English and German languages. Sushrut the inventor of this branch of medicine is mentioned in the Mahabharata as the Son of the great sage Vishvamitra. Sushrut Samhita contains chapters on Sootrasthan (sootras about diseases), Nidanasthan (diagnosis), Shareerasthan (physiology and medicine), Chikitsasthan (prognosis) and Kalpasthan (treatment). It also contains one more chapter called Uttarasthan which is supposed to have been extrapolated into it later. Sushrut also classifies dreams as auspicious and inauspicious and tells what they portend.

He says if a person dreams any of the following, he will become ill or will pass away. These inauspicious dreams are: dreaming of being anointed with oil and being carried away on the back of a camel, a beast, a donkey, a pig or a buffalo towards the south; seeing an individual bound and being carried away towards the south by a laughing and dancing,

dark skinned woman in red clothes with her hair untied; being dragged towards the south by a Shoodra (a very low caste person); being hugged by a dead person or a Sanyasin (religious mendicant); being sniffed by a beast with a ferocious face; drinking honey or oil; getting stuck in mire; smearing the body with mud and dancing or laughing; stripping and holding a red garland on the head; a Bamboo or a Palmyra tree shooting out of one's chest; being gulped by a fish; falling into the mother's womb; being carried away by river water; shaving one's head; being tied; being surrounded by crow or vultures; seeing a falling star; an extinguishing lamp; losing an eye; destruction of deities; earthquake; vomiting; having loose motions; losing a tooth; climbing trees such as Neem tree, silk cotton tree, Palas tree, a flowering Kachanar tree; climbing Yadnya pole, anthill, or a pyre; finding or eating cotton, oil, iron, salt or sesame and eating meat and drinking liquor.

He also makes some exceptions to this rule. If the dream is due to Vat-Pitta-Kaf (wind-bile-phlegm) or is forgotten or suppressed by another dream, or seen again in the night, or a dream that is seen during day, it does not produce any effect. He also gives details as to which dream, when seen by a person suffering from which disease will cause death. At the same time he does not forget to mention the remedies that can help escape the impending danger or even death. The remedial measures are: whenever a person has any of the above dreams in the night, the first thing he should do in the morning is to give Udeed (a kind of beans), sesame, iron and gold to Brahmins. He should repeat Mrityunjay Mantra or Gayatri Mantra again and again. If the dream is seen in the first quarter of the night he should refrain from having sex and should not disclose it to anyone, spend the next three days in a temple and gratify Brahmins offering them pooja, food, etc.

Hypotheses are completely ruled out:

If one sees a falling star or a lamp that is about to extinguish, he will fall sick. So says Sushrut. But on what basis does he draw this conclusion or establish a cause-effect relation between the two phenomena? Again even if you accept that the fruit of horrible dream is bad and is a dangerous omen; the doubts still remain: how can giving gold and money to Brahmins ward off the impending danger? What experiments proved the efficacy of this remedy? In what way is the shooting up of a bamboo or Palmyra tree from the chest related to contacting a disease? What experiments were conducted to establish such relation? The Sanhita (a compilation or code) does not give any details whatsoever. Regarding skin diseases Sushrut says leprosy is caused by sin of killing a Brahmin

or a woman or a pious man, confiscating others' wealth, hating Brahmins and Guru. Sheetala (small pox) is caused because of the wrath of the deity Sheetala or because of unpropitious stars or their conjunctions according to Ayurved. Thus the etiology (process of assigning causes of diseases) of skin diseases according to Ayurved is not related to physiology but to moral, spiritual, astrological and religious behaviors and rituals.

The previous birth, the next birth or the cycle of rebirths are concepts of spiritual nature and have no scientific foundation. That individuals have previous births or rather a chain of earlier births has so far not been proved scientifically. So the Ayurvedic causality relating skin diseases to the sins committed in the earlier birth- sounds quite illogical. A similar cause-effect relation between bad behavior (like slandering or reviling anybody, being ungrateful, committing sins or telling lies) and suffering from skin disease as ascertained in astrology cannot hold up. In the first place the discipline of astrology is not a science. And secondly slandering and being ungrateful etc. is moral turpitude and therefore contemptible but it surely cannot produce skin disease. The same logic applies to the fruits, dreams are supposed to produce as per the Sushrut Sanhita. The method of inference regarding the cause of the disease and the remedial measures suggested in it namely relating the dreams that augur ill to physical ailments and offering lots of money and gold to Brahmins as remedial measures-is equally ridiculous.

In this connection it is worth noting that the Cultural and Literary Association of Maharashtra State have produced a dictionary of Ayurved, the preface of which is written by Tarkateertha Lakshmana Shastri Joshi. In this preface Tarkateertha says, 'a proper appraisal of Ayurvedic hypotheses in the light of modern physiotherapy and psychoanalysis has not so far been undertaken. When measures for maintaining health, diagnosing diseases and genesis of remedial measures in Ayurved are examined, it is necessary to examine the Ayurvedic hypotheses too. It is necessary to determine the veracity of these hypotheses scientifically...' In the Allopathic therapy medicines used for treating leprosy or other skin diseases were given approval only after subjecting them to tough scientific tests.

Contribution of Western Scientists

Western scientists and philosophers have been investigating the phenomenon of dreams for a very long time, taking into consideration factors like inferences from observations, seasonal changes, human

nature and human health. Hippocrates who lived during the period 460 to 377 BC was a great scientist of the Greek tradition. In his period diseases were believed to be caused by the wrath of some deity or other. Hippocrates refuted this belief and maintained that the cause of all diseases is not the wrath of any deity. The cause is of a physical nature and therefore the remedial measures too should be taken on physical basis. Later Gallon a physician scientist of the Hippocratic tradition (131 to 201 AD) experimented on the brain and the nervous system and arrived at some important inferences regarding human physiology. A lot of research has been done, in modern times regarding the structure and working of the human brain. The brain is active during sleep also. Aristotle thought that through the medium of dreams we receive warnings regarding the impending physical and mental diseases. Hippocrates too held the same opinion. Later during different periods of history a number of physicians studied the dreams of their patients and tried to draw valuable inferences from them.

Doctor Kasatkin, a Russian brain specialist undertook a deep research in the study of dreams. As a part of his research he told his patients to keep detailed accounts of all the dreams they had. His patients came from various professions. The details of Dr. Kasatkin's research, spanning 40 years are astonishing. He has collected details of 22,000 dreams. From this far-reaching research and the massive details he collected, Dr. Kasatkin arrived at the following important conclusions: the brain of an individual is able to notice even minute variation of temperature and can hear various sounds even while he is asleep; the stimulation received by one part of the brain spreads all over the brain; any minute change in the environment alerts the brain even during sleep; similarly the brain perceives all small physical irritations and aches during sleep and intimates the same through appropriate dreams, etc. On the basis of this research he developed his 'Theory of Dreams' later.

As opposed to this no such research seems to have been undertaken in the field of Ayurvedic medicine on the causal relation between dreams and skin diseases. The practitioners of Ayurved are not keen to verify the statements made in Sushrut Sanhita that encourage superstitions by testing them scientifically. This indifference towards verifying the authenticity by scientific tests grows out of the firm belief in the 'Book'. Such blind faith obliterates progress of the Ayurvedic Therapy. All the tomes of Ayurved and especially the Sushrut Sanhita ought to be examined and rewritten to ensure that the baby is not thrown with the bath water. The state of Goa has taken the initial step in this direction. We

have at Shiroda in Goa an Ayurvedic college fully equipped with all modern facilities and conveniences for more than a hundred students to learn and carry out research in Ayurved. The principal of this college, Dr. J.R.V. Murthi ably guides them and their research work.

Some time back I had an opportunity of meeting with Dr. Murthi when we discussed all these issues-dreams and their connection with diseases, skin diseases and causes of skin diseases and rewriting the Sushrut Sanhita. Agreeing with me, Dr. Murthi added, like all other fields of medicine, in Ayurved too conducting modern scientific research is necessary and the Ayurved graduates of our college are capable of undertaking such research. I am confident that these graduates will dedicate themselves to such research that is long overdue.

18 April, 2004



Scope of Rationalism

A cursory survey of the History of Rationalism shows that it has been, from the beginning of the movement, directed against Theism based on Revelation, or divine instinct in man. There has been no satisfactory account given in any Scriptures of the West or the East, as to the reliability of the medium through which God has revealed Himself and His religious doctrines to Mankind in any age. The writers of the religious texts said to have been revealed, exercised and laid down several absurd theories and tenets, which, for several centuries were taken as true in the respective localities, by the ignorant and illiterate people, and innumerable superstitious habits and customs thus came into vogue.

Gradually as some people advanced in education and in powers of reasoning, doubts began to be entertained as to the truth and utility of the teachings recorded in Scriptures and their subsequent interpolations teeming with contradictions and absurdities. The faith in the people, in general, grow very strong because of the observance of the rituals enjoined on them, for hundreds of generations, with the result that they were all rooted to the very fibre of their mental constitution; and they could not tolerate any opposition. Rational thinkers have found it very dangerous to interfere with the trend of beliefs and thoughts, prevailing among people.

RD KARVE

Truth of the Fish-Remedy

Asthma patients from all over India gather in Hyderabad in the first week of the month of June. They are at their wits' end for, so far no remedy has helped them to get rid of this suffocating illness. They flock here, by the thousands, in Hyderabad for a treatment called, 'Matsyopachar' (meaning fish-remedy). Members of one family, Gaud by name, administer this treatment once every year. The treatment does not take long and the patients can leave for their homes immediately.

In the 9th June issue of 'Dainik Bharat' the photograph of an Asthma patient undergoing this treatment was published. The thousands of asthmatics who gather here for the treatment are ill informed regarding the treatment or its efficacy. It is necessary that they should make proper inquiries before undergoing such weird and strange treatment administered without taking proper hygienic measures.

All members of this Gaud or Gauda family have been treating asthmatic patients for the last 160 years running through several generations. They claim that the patients get rid of their asthma completely and permanently. 7th of June is the day when the Moon enters the fifth asterism in its path, called Mriga Nakshatra according to the Hindu Almanac. This day is the most auspicious one for the 'fish treatment' and is meticulously abided by as such. The treatment, it is said, would be useless if given on any other day.

The modus operandi of this treatment is as follows. A thick layer of paste made out of a certain medicinal herb is stuffed into the mouth of a small yellowish fish, about an inch in length. The fish is alive at the time of the treatment. The live fish, before reaching the stomach of the patient cleans up the patient's mouth and throat as it flaps its gills and tail by removing the sticky phlegm. The patient is inveigled into believing that the treatment has afforded him great relief from his ailment. Patients pour in from not only Andhra Pradesh but also from the neighbouring

states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Orissa for the fish treatment by the Gaud family. At times the crowd becomes unmanageable leading to chaos. Then the police have to be called in to establish order.

The whole procedure of the fish treatment is free of charge. Patients are sent home as soon as the treatment is finished. Every patient is given a tube of the paste that is put in the mouth of the fish, which is to be taken three times a day. The patient is also told about the restrictions the dos and don'ts of diet, etc. When so much effort is put in for the recovery of the patient by the Gaud family and that too without charging any fees whatsoever, everybody is thoroughly impressed by the family's altruistic benevolence and believes in their supernatural powers. It also attracts many more asthma patients next year on 7th of June. But a close look at this whole ceremony reveals the truth behind the charity and the alleged supernatural powers of the Gaudas and exposes the deceit involved in this practice.

The truth behind the feeling of relief

It is true that immediately after the treatment the patients feel great relief from their age old asthmatic trouble. But at the same time, it is equally true that the relief that the patients feel is only temporary. The paste that is stuffed into the mouth of the fish, although supposed to be made of some medicinal herb, actually contains steroids, the intake of which stimulates the feeling of freshness and vigour for a short while. The patient later falls back to his original condition and begins to wheeze and gasp for breath. The paste given to carry home is some ordinary herbal medicine and has no effect on the patient's ailment. The patient then instead of doubting the efficacy of the medicine blames his own self for not being able to scrupulously follow the instructions, even though inadvertently and patiently waits for the next Mriga Nakshtra- i.e. 7th June. On that day he proceeds to Hyderabad once again for the same fish therapy and then repeatedly every year as a veteran.

It should be noted here that there are some ailments for which no effective, trustworthy remedy has so far been found. Asthma is one such disease. It can be controlled to an extent but cannot be cured. Many people badly suffer from it and since there is no sure remedy, many phony remedies, that guarantee a permanent cure, are advertized and the harassed patients get duped by them. The fish therapy is one such scam. Not a single example of a permanent cure of asthma by this treatment has so far been cited. In the olden days, in India, allopathic treatments and

medicines had not been popular enough because ordinary people could ill-afford such a costly treatment. Naturally people approached a quack doctor for relief from all ailments. The quack doctors used to ask people to chant certain mantras every day along with his medicine. The human body possesses a self curing mechanism and common minor diseases do get cured without any proper medicine; but whenever a patient is cured of such diseases the quack doctor is thanked. His medicine, however failed to cure diseases like Asthma. The patient was able to complain about the failure of the medicine but would not do so for he could always be found wanting in the accurate chanting of the Mantra.

Action taken in Goa

The fish therapy caught the imagination of the masses and spread the superstition far and wide. Yet it is unmistakably a fraud. In 1954 the government has enacted a law called, 'Magic Remedies' Actionable Advertisement Act' according to which the fish therapy is a cognizable offense. Fish therapy being under the purview of this law, the government department of food and drugs can take cognizance of and action against those who indulge in this practice. Three years back, the food and drugs department of the government of Goa did take action against this practice in Panaji, the capital of Goa, when some news papers advertised the fish therapy for asthmatic patients, practiced in Hyderabad. This happened in the month of May. The activists of the Goa 'Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti' (association for eradicating superstitions) brought it to the notice of the then Director, Department of Food and Drugs, Shri S.N. Tripathi. He immediately gave orders to trap those Vaidus (quacks) who had come to Panaji to treat asthmatic patients in a hotel. They were arrested for cheating their patients and all their equipment and other stuff was confiscated by the police.

These Vaidus administering fish therapy or any other traditional medicines treat patients free of charge. Their philosophy as they publicize, is that making money out of this treatment reduces or destroys the potential of the Mantra and the medicine and also of the Vaidu cum Mantrik. This pretense of integrity and spiritual high ground deceives the gullible impatient asthmatics but has no truth in it. For, almost all the Vaidus accept (and also expect) much more valuable offerings as their birthright from the patients. For instance one such Vaidu claiming sure cure for all eye diseases opened his charitable clinic for treatment of eye diseases-putting two drops of some liquid in the eyes- in Goa and collected just one coconut from each patient. The value of all the coconuts he collected, in a few days, ran into several lakhs. The Vaidus of

Hyderabad giving fish therapy free of charge also accept something or other from the patients and yet claim that their treatment is free. The patients religiously observe the tradition of offering valuable gifts to the Vaidus and also the tradition of being cheated generation after generation; all because of superstitious beliefs.

25 May, 2004



Double Tragedy

We Indians are an old people in a new world. That is our tragedy. We are not only an old people in a new world but we take pride in that fact and that is our double tragedy.

Reincarnation

If you believe that you have a thousand lives, while in fact you have only one. You will not exert yourself in that one life to make it meaningful either to yourself or to your fellow humanbeings. And therein lies the blighting influence of the false belief of birth after birth after birth.

Science and Philosophy

Science should explain the world to man; philosophy should teach man as to know how he could make his life in the world joyous as well as meaningful.

Immortality

Work for a great idea or better still, for a great ideal, for that idea or ideal may acquire a life of its own, a life that knows no death.

Advaita

Advaita is unending prattle on what is said to be the unseeable, unmeasurable, the unnamable, the unknowable, etc. etc.. etc.

V. R. NARLA

Adhik Mas Pothi: Religious Terrorism

Adhik Mas means an intercalary month an extra month-formed of the aggregate days omitted in reckoning the lunar year and that comes once in every two and a half years, to make the calendar year agree with the solar year. And Pothi is a treatise extolling the religious importance of some day, month, occurrence or ritual. This year (2004) we have Adhik Shravan i.e. an extra Shravan month that begins on 18th of July; thus making the year of 13 lunar months. The Gregorian calendar, that is in use in western countries always has just 12 months in every year; no more and no less. It is only in the Hindu almanac that one of the months from Chaitra (the 1st month of the year) to Ashvin (the 7th month) occurs twice after every two and a half years and is given the name of that month.

We have various religious festive occasions to celebrate every month when every house holder is expected to spend on Dan-Dharma (giving away to Brahmins and poor people.) In the Adhik Mas one is expected to spend more than usual on Dan-Dharma because this extra month multiplies the Punya (merit) of one's Dan-Dharma. The already strained pecuniary state of the householder is stressed further. This has given rise to the saying 'the thirteenth month in a famine!'

The family cleric warns us that Adhik Mas is ominous, unholy, and also likely to cause trouble. He also tells that it is necessary, in order to ward off the impending evils of the Adhik Mas, that one gives gold to the family cleric in this month. Most of us believe in Dan-Dharma (giving away) and also believe in our family cleric and do what he tells us to do, without bothering to find out what is Adhik Mas. We imagine it to be some impending blow from the blue. And without wasting more time on brooding over the significance of Adhik Mas, we dash to the market to buy all the stuff required for the Poojas recommended by the family priest. Some people even borrow money to spend of the rituals and

giving away to the Brahmin Priest. It is long overdue now, that we deliberate on the propriety of all observances during this special month, which comes all too often as 'the thirteenth month during a famine' (extending the already strained conditions.) We need to ask ourselves-is this month really ominous and unholy? How is it related to Dan-Dharma? Why should we give away things only to the family priest? What exactly is Adhik Mas and why it occurs only in the Hindu almanac? Let us try to get answers to all these questions.

Both the Lunar and the Solar months have been in vogue in India since the Vedic period. But there is a bit of discrepancy between the two. The days of the 12 Solar Months add up to 365 days (approximately because in every four years a day has to be added and the year called leap year has 366 days) while the total of the days of the 12 lunar months is 354 days. Thus the Lunar year will fall back by 12 days behind the Solar year. In 33 solar years period the Lunar year will add up to 34 years, i.e. one extra year. This happens in the almanac of the Muslims. They too have a lunar almanac. Another difficulty arises when every year all the Muslim festivals come 12 days earlier than the previous year. To avoid this discrepancy after every 32 or 33 Lunar months one extra Lunar month has to be added to that year, which is done in the Hindu Lunar almanac. If this adjustment had not been made, the Diwali festival would rotate through the year and even fall in the month of May. This 13th month of a year that comes once after approximately 2 years and 8 months is what is called the Adhik Mas. Some much more complicated calculations are involved in determining which month becomes the Adhik Mas, about which we need not bother here. But the gist of all this is that the Adhik Mas is nothing more than some adjustment made to remove the discrepancy between the calculations of the solar and the lunar years and also to adjust the cycle of seasons with the months and festivals.

But this extra month is declared to be impious and called Mala Mas (a dirty month). A mythical story woven around the Adhik Mas tells us that the Adhik Mas (personified) was utterly unhappy to be called a Mal Mas. Lord Vishnu took pity on him and took him to Lord Shri Krishna, who changed his name to Purushottam Mas- the month of the perfect man-month of Lord Vishnu- and made it a pious and prestigious month. Shri Krishna also declared that anybody who undertakes pious observances and religiously follows rituals in this month will acquire all the wealth he aspires to. Shri Krishna thus emancipated the Mala Mas to become the Purushottam Mas. The Adhik Mas Pothi tells a house holder to offer

meals to a Brahmin couple. In addition he is also expected to donate gold to the family priest. The observances prescribed during this month include remaining under the obligation of some religious vow every day and feed Brahmins to complete the observance.

The story assures us that those who meticulously observe religious vow will be happy and prosperous; and also warns that those who neglect the religious obligations will have endless trouble. Shri Krishna had told the Pandavas that they had incurred the curse of being banished to live in the forest and suffer all sorts of adversities because they neglected the Adhik Mas observances. Narad Muni tells a story in which the King Dridhadhanva who did not have a son prayed Shri Krishna. But instead of Lord Krishna, Garud (a sort of demigod) appeared in front of him and said, 'oh, king you will beget a son who, however, will be shortlived.' And true enough the king's son, Shuk drowned in water while playing and died. The grief stricken King again prayed Lord Krishna who taking pity on the king, now appeared himself and brought his dead son back to life. Later the sage Valmiki advised this king how to undertake and fulfill the Adhik Mas observances and avoid all impending calamities.

According to another story there lived a Shudra (person of the lowest caste) Manigreev by name, in the city called 'Chamatkar'. This man was very brutal and cruel. The residents of the town ousted him from their town and he had to stay away in dire conditions there without any help. One day he came across a Brahmin who was lying unconscious on the ground. Manigreev revived him and nursed him till he became fit. The Brahmin was much pleased with him and advised him to undertake Adhik Mas Observance, on fulfilling which, the Shudra became prosperous.

This Pothi is regarded as religious scripture and we tend to ignore the worthlessness of the unbelievable stories told in it. This is how we are deceived because the stories lead us (at least the gullible people) to believe that Adhik Mas happens to be some kind of natural disaster or divine wrath. It is neither. As said earlier it is an attempt to adjust the deficit of days that occur in every Lunar year and harmonize it with the seasons and the Solar Almanac. It is only an interlude which is neither pious nor impious. Just try to think; how can a month be taken to appear before Shri Krishna by Shri Vishnu? How can an interlude of time be purified? When you examine these stories in detail, they prove to be utterly licentious idle stories.

All other Pothis too are replete with such wild idle stories and yet we

do not object to reciting them. In the story of Satyanarayan, hearing the unbelievable story brings up the ship that is drowned with all the men on board alive. When the daughter in law of a poor Brahmin feeds the Shani Dev who appears before her in the guise of a leper, her hut gets full with all sorts of food grains by the grace of the deity. On the other hand another daughter in law who did not feed the same Shani in the leper's disguise was cursed and ruined. When the King Vikram jeered at Shani Maharaj, he incurred calamities one followed by the other. Finally as the repentant King Vikram surrendered to the deity, his severed limbs were reaffixed. This goes on and on because no evidence or even any logical reasoning is necessary for spinning such stories.

Actually the planet Shani i.e. Saturn is much larger in size and much farther away from the sun than is the earth and rotates around the sun at a radius of 88.7 crore miles. However even when the American spacecraft 'Cassini' reached its orbit, the Shani that makes us gullible Indians to tremble with fear could not, in the least, hurt the president of America.

The Adhik Mas Pothi and the Shanimahatmya Pothi have many things in common. The stories in both books are just idle fantasies. Both make attempts to instill fear in the minds of those who do not observe the prescribed rituals. They are told that they will have to suffer dire consequences of the deity's wrath giving number of examples to illustrate how badly the infidels suffer. Reading such stories, susceptible people are scared into submitting to the demands of the prescribed observances. Thus these Pothis are pure and simple religious terrorism. Moreover in the Pothi of Adhik Mas the compilers of that Pothi could not find any Brahmin or any high caste individual to depict a cruel and brutal person; such a cruel and brutal one had to be a Shoodra! We cannot ignore this bias of a jaundiced eye.

In all the Pothis a householder, in order to gather Punya (merit), is expected to give away to the Brahmins and not other caste individuals. May be that the Brahmins, in those days, were not well to do people, while they had to be maintained by the society for their erudition. Now, however, they are quite well off. Bhiksuki (family priest-hood) has become an attractive and prosperous business, especially in foreign countries where a large number of Hindus have settled. An erstwhile minister of education in the Central Government wanted to introduce a course in the universities to produce certified Bhikshuks who would study our scriptures and officially conduct all religious ceremonies and rituals, strictly according to 'Shruti-Smriti-Puran' (i.e. according to

Vedas, the body of law as delivered by Manu and other sages and memorized by their pupils and the mythical stories in various Puranas). It would have been a good lucrative job opportunity. But the party lost power and the next one that acquired power struck down the idea.

Giving away to the Brahmins, today, in my opinion is a waste, for neither do the Brahmins have monopoly of erudition, nor do they need any sustenance from the society as they have entered into many other businesses and livelihoods and are quite well off. Instead, one should donate as much as one can to the charitable institutions and poor students- Brahmins or non-Brahmins that are really needy and will use your money for good purpose. In case you need to feed as per your vow, feed the hungry farm laborers or the children on the streets that are left to fetch for themselves. Despite whatever is said in the Pothi, this act will give you lots of satisfaction!

20 July, 2004



"What I Believe"

I believe that when I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive. I am not young and I love life. But I should scorn to shiver with terror at the thought of annihilation. Happiness is nonetheless true happiness because it must come to an end, nor do thought and love lose their value because they are not everlasting. Many a man has borne himself proudly on the scaffold; surely the same pride should teach us to think truly about man's place in the world. Even if the open windows of science at first make us shiver after the cosy indoor warmth of traditional humanizing myths, in the end the fresh air brings vigour, and the great spaces have a splendour of their own.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

The Mass-Murder at Sindhudurg: Aghori Vidya

In Sindhudurga District every sensitive citizen was distressed on hearing about this heinous crime perpetrated against helpless people. The reason for this ruthless mass killing is all the more disconcerting and alarming. A few greedy people believed the empty promises of a Mantrik who assured them that he has the power to make money fall like rain from the sky and make them rich. But for this to happen they need to sacrifice human beings. They procured these human beings to be sacrificed from the surrounding areas of the jungle. Promising them huge hidden wealth, they led them deep into the jungle and sacrificed them.

The desire to become rich overnight is almost universal; but superstitious people, in addition, believe that it is possible for people with supernatural powers to make them rich instantly, which in fact, leads many of them to ruin. In the villages there are gangs of thugs that go from door to door promising women that they can double their gold ornaments with the help of Mantras, that they have obtained through great penance. The gullible women hand over whatever little they possess by way of gold ornaments to these thugs who then just disappear. But whenever the police are able to trace them, take them into custody and thrash them, all their powers claimed to have been acquired through great penance vanish. They are convicted and put behind bars like any ordinary person. But it never occurs to us to question how the divine power they claim, fails to protect them from the whip of the police. The source of their so called divine power actually lies in our inability or inertia to think, to reason and to ask questions.

The Sindhudurg massacre has revealed one more disgusting and shameful fact. Although the inhuman act was instigated by a Mantrik promising 'a rain of money' to those greedy people, the fact remains that despite the wide spread education reaching all corners of the country, people still have faith in these wily Tantriks (those who know Tantras)

and cannot see through their schemes. They seem to get deceived willingly and sacrifice their and others' lives. They still believe that the Tantriks acquire formidable supernatural powers because of their Mantra-Tantra (peculiar formulae and rites); they can double any quantity of gold; they can trace any hidden wealth; they can vanquish an enemy or even eliminate him with the help of their Mantras. Such irrational and unfounded beliefs have led to the heinous crime that was perpetrated in the Nandos Jungle.

It will be useful, at this juncture, to ponder over the questions that arise out of this incident. They are: what is the nature of the Karmakanda (rites and rituals) of those who claim to have acquired such formidable supernatural powers? Can they really sense and identify where exactly wealth has been buried under the ground by our ancestors? Can they eliminate our enemies? Can they really cause wealth to pour like rain? Etc. To understand how the belief in such supernatural powers arose and is sustained till today, it is necessary to recapitulate the earlier primitive stages of human ratiocination.

As we all now accept, Man has evolved from apelike ancestors and it took him several lakhs of years to evolve out of this savage like, early human stage. For a long time he was not able to discern the causes of natural phenomena or what was happening around him. With his still immature intellect he started thinking over causal relations between them. Quite often he was led astray for lack of enough knowledge. He thought that the sun disappears during an eclipse because he is swallowed by some evil power, so he beat drums as hard as he could, to scare those powers away. He thought that the loud rumbling of the clouds occurs when the evil powers grind chick peas and the lightning is caused when the charioteer of Lord Indra lashes his horses with a whip. In order to appease these invisible powers in the nature, he started worshipping them. Man's curiosity-his characteristic ability, his thirst for knowledge grew as the time passed and his brain developed all the while. He began to unravel the mysteries of the unseen powers. He established cause-effect relation between many phenomena and solved the mysteries behind them. Yet not all human beings have been able to overcome the mindset and outlook of the primitive stage; certain tribes and sects still believe in the unseen evil powers and appease them. The rituals of their worship still happen to be horrific and hideous. These sects are called Aghori sects.

In the Yajurved there is a chapter on Rudra (a demigod-a somewhat inferior manifestation of Shiva). In one stanza Rudra is mentioned as

Aghortanu (meaning his body is Aghori-horrifying). In the province of Karnataka Lord Shiva is worshiped as Aghoreeshvar (the god of the Aghori sect) even today. This establishes a connection between lord Shiva and the Aghori Sect. A person is initiated into this sect after performing a special ceremony. The ceremony begins with the blowing of a conch by the Guru. The novice with a clean shaven head is brought before the Guru. The Guru pours some water, mixed with some chemical and held in human skull, on his head. The aspiring member of the Aghori sect has to drink liquor. In front of the Guru cooked food that is collected by begging is kept in a bowl. Guru feeds the novice with his own hands. Then he is given saffron clothes which he wears and comes before the Guru. Lastly the Guru imparts a mantra in the years of this new disciple.

There are a few weird practices in this ceremony. Eating human flesh is a necessary part of it. Yuan Chuang, the Chinese traveler of the old, has described the people belonging to the Aghori Sect. These people, he says, smear their bodies with ashes, wear garlands of human skulls and shamelessly roam about with naked bodies. Some of them tie leaves or thick peelings of tree trunks round their waist. Their deity is Chamunda (a female deity with four heads) who demands a human sacrifice. The devotees partake of the flesh of the sacrificed human being as the deity's Prasad (mark of favour by her). They also mix their own feces in the Prasad as a part of the initiation ceremony; and drink the water mixed in it straining it with a cloth. They believe all these weird acts confer superhuman powers on them.

The senseless cock-and-bull story

It is commonly believed that Fakirs, witches, Mantriks and the Aghoris acquire superhuman evil powers through their weird rituals. Even people in power, especially the princes of the yore, ruling in some states during the British Raj believed in the supernatural power of these people. They hired flocks of Fakirs and witches, sent them with their armies hoping that they will provide protection for the soldiers by their superhuman powers. In his book on the rebellion of 1857, 'Atharashie Sattavnachee Shipaigiri' Professor N.R. Phatak has described how the army of the Maratha Sardar, Nagpurkar Bhosale was defeated because of superstitious belief. When the Maratha army came face to face with the British army, the British Commander noticed that the Maratha army was led by a band of Fakirs and Witches, who were expected to protect the army with their supernatural powers. The British Commander pumped just one bullet into the chest of the first Fakir in front of him. The Fakir

collapsed; rest of the Fakirs and witches took to their heels. Seeing the protectors fleeing from the battle field the soldiers too dragged their feet and fled. The British Commander won the battle without a fight.

In short the concepts regarding the so called supernatural or superhuman powers are rooted in the ignorance of the primitive man when his knowledge was meager and he had not yet reasonably developed the faculty of ratiocination to establish cause-effect relation between phenomena. The powers that are conceived to have been acquired by these Fakirs, Witches, etc. are nonexistent. They cannot do any harm to anyone, nor can they help anyone in any way. Ghosts and fiends being nothing more than mental concepts cannot be appeased. The Aghori Vidya (the discipline followed by the Aghoris), therefore does not give the follower any extra power, or help him do any evil to his enemy or help him beget a child by sacrificing any other child. It cannot find any wealth buried in the ground long ago, nor can it create any desired object like doubling money, gold, or any other object. All the beliefs regarding such supernatural powers are nothing but superstition.

The murders in the jungles of Nandos in the Sindhudurga district have once again brought the issue of dangerous superstitions that still beset our society to the fore. It emphasizes the need for greater and more sustained efforts to eradicate superstition.

10 Dec, 2003



"I'm atheist"

In the first place, I'm sort of an atheist. I like Jesus and all, but I don't care too much for most of the other stuff in the Bible. Take the Disciples, for instance. They annoy the hell out of me, if you want to know the truth. They were all right after Jesus was dead and all, but while He was alive, they were about as much use to Him as a hole in the head. All they did was keep letting Him down. I like almost anybody in the Bible better than the Disciples. If you want to know the truth, the guy I like best in the Bible, next to Jesus, was that lunatic and all, that lived in the tombs and kept cutting himself with stones. I like him ten times as much as the Disciples, that poor bastard.

J. D. SALINGER,

The Catcher in the Rye

Religious Terrorism and Awakening of Reason

Narendra Maharaj of Nanij calls himself a disciple of the late Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon. He decided to arrange a grand ceremony to celebrate the day when his guru- Gajanan Maharaj revealed himself before this beloved disciple of his. The news spread like wild fire among all the devotees of both these late and living Maharajas. On the appointed day of the ceremony, the Kunjavani hill of Nanij was chock-a-block with devotees. After listening to the sermon of Narendra Maharaj the devotees who had arrived there from other places proceeded on their return journey. Among them were some devotees from Bhandup, a suburb of Mumbai. As the Sumo in which they were travelling reached Gadab, a small town in the Raigad District, they met with a horrible accident. Five devotees from the Sumo were killed on the spot and 13 of them were injured. All these devotees between seventy and thirty years of age were residents of Bhandup. No wonder, not only the friends and relatives of these unfortunate devotees were plunged in heartrending sorrow but the whole of the Bhandup suburb was grief stricken.

What must have lured these people-young and old alike- into travelling all the way to Nanij, keeping their normal business aside and seek a glimpse of the fraudulent Narendra Maharaj? Such cases are very common. When faced with difficulties, instead of squarely facing them and trying to solve the problems, most people quickly give up and surrender to god or some so called spiritual person like Narendra Maharaj. Those who are passing through very hard times are advised by others to visit certain Jagrit Devasthan (a temple where the deity is alive and eager to fulfill the wishes of the devotees) or a certain Maharaj who is supposed to have acquired supernatural powers. The unfortunate residents of Bhandup, feeling helpless in a grim situation must have been similarly advised by their well-wishers to visit Narendra Maharaj; and not to leave any stone unturned, they must have come to seek blessings

from this Maharaj also. But the tragic trip to Nanij took their lives or limbs. All this happened because of superstitious beliefs. Even after getting a good vision of the Maharaj and listening to his sermon, the unfortunate Bhandup residents instead of being relieved of their difficulties were beset with more trouble. Another such incident took place seven months back on the day of Guru-Poornima. On this day devotees waited in a very long queue to have a glimpse of Narendra Maharaj at the Nanij Math. The Talkar family from the Keri town from North Goa, too, was patiently waiting in the queue. As soon as they had a good look at the Maharaj and received his blessings, they proceeded to return in their Sumo Motorcar. They too, like the Bhandup residents met with a horrible accident on their way home, at Oras village. Four members of the Talkar family were killed on the spot and one injured member was taken to hospital; he too died three days later. This family also was passing through very difficult times. Some well wisher advised them to visit Nanij and unwittingly helped to wipe out the whole family.

Both these tragedies-the one at Gadab and the other at Oras described above will bring tears to any sensitive human being. People are worried because of bad pecuniary condition, ill health of the near and dear ones, bickering and disputes in the family and such other concerns of life and to overcome these difficulties keep visiting these spiritual Gurus again and again. Circumstances remain unchanged but the repeated visits empty their pockets increasing their worries. Some even go to the length of borrowing more money and keep visiting the Maharaj. Why do they not learn any lesson; why don't they realize the futility of these trips? This unreasonable behavior occurs because the spiritual Gurus wield a powerful tool the tool of spiritual terror; the Gurus prophecy some impending horrible events. They also proclaim that the only escape available is to surrender to that particular Guru.

Narendra Maharaj had made such a prophecy about five years ago. He had pronounced that on the 19th of July 1999, a world war will begin; innumerable human lives will be lost as was indicated by his Antarman (inner mind as it literally means). (Ref: Narendra Gatha, August 1998, pp 15 to 19.) No wonder, the devotees who had gathered to hear him were petrified. They became more and more nervous as the dooms day of July 19th approached. They were scared that they along with their families will be killed. But to assuage the fears of his devotees the kindly Maharaj arranged for distribution of Sanrakshak Kavach - natural protective shields to his devotees, of course for a price. Narendra Maharaj had produced these armatures out of his supernatural powers. Through

'Narendra Gatha' he declared that only his own ardent devotees wearing the spiritual shield provided by him will ultimately be saved. All the rest will perish. He also affirmed that the prophet whom Nostradamus had alluded to is none other than he himself and he has now arrived on this earth to save his devotees.

Taking notice of all these grandiloquent claim Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, president of ANiS, met with Narendra Maharaj and had a one to one discussion. During this question-answer session Narendra Maharaj had admitted that he does not perform any miracles; nor does he claim to be the incarnation of the late Gajanan Maharaj of Shegaon or of any deity. All this conversation was filmed and both the Maharashtra and the Goa area offices of ANiS possess these films.

Predictions made by Nostradamus are quite controversial and cannot be dealt with in details in this short article. But we may mention here, in short that Nostradamus was a medicine man in the court of Luis the 9th, who ruled over France in the 16th century. This shrewd man, Nostradamus had discerned astutely that people are enamoured of supernatural and mystical powers and also eager to know what is going to happen in the future. He exploited this human craze and started making predictions of future events the world over, in order to get into lime light. His predictions were made in the form of short verses. Every verse was some kind of mystical prediction stated in a very ambiguous language. Nostradamus cunningly ensured that no explicit interpretation of any of his verses was possible. This statement has been unhesitatingly supported by many scholars.

One of his ambiguous stanzas is interpreted to mean something like this: 'Life on this earth will be beset with calamities; then a prophet will be born and he will free human beings from all difficulties.' Narendra Maharaj claims that the prophet mentioned here, in this stanza is none other than he himself. Now the fact is that this and all other predictions made by Nostradamus have been proved to be wrong. It is ridiculous for Narendra Maharaj, or anyone else for that matter, to identify himself as the imaginary prophet mentioned in a fraudulent prediction. Narendra Maharaja's forecast of a world war destroying humanity has already been proved false. The war did not occur. The need for a protective armature-the Sanrakshak Kavach- produced by Narendra Maharaj himself did not arise. However during the summer of 1999, India was compelled to engage in a war with Pakistan in the Kargil region in the north. Down south, in the Konkan area Narendra Maharaj was busy distributing his Sanrakshak Kavachas for the protection of the residents of that region.

Why did he not go to Kargil instead and protect the lives of our brave soldiers with his Sanrakshak Kavach?

Need for a Constant Vigil and Awakening of People

Another question that arises is why this self proclaimed prophet who is born to relieve the whole of humanity did not, or could not save the lives of the Talkar family from Keri or the devotees from Bhandup? All these people were devotees of Narendra Maharaj, earning their bread through honest work and leading a simple life. They were returning home after having fulfilled their wish of seeing the Maharaj and obtaining his blessings. Instead they either perished or were badly injured in two ghastly accidents. Why? Why did the Maharaj not reach the spots of the accidents to help his devotees? Were all his spirituality and his supernatural powers suddenly rendered ineffective? There is only one answer. The spiritual powers and supernatural abilities claimed by Narendra Maharaj or any other schemer are non-existent; and so are the protective shields they pretend to provide.

Despite such accidents, the word of warning that 'those who do not put on the protecting shield provided by Narendra Maharaj will perish' was spread through Narendra Gatha. This warning is nothing short of spiritual terrorism. It spread throughout the Konkan area and North Goa. The effect, as expected by the Maharaj was that the gullible people of this area, scared by the warning, began travelling to Nanij Math, inviting more accidents like those at Gadab in Raigad district and Keri in Goa. These accidents are most unfortunate and all our sympathies are with the victims and their near and dear ones. But should we not learn a lesson from this? Let us keep our heads cool and think. Let us not waste our precious time in repeated visits to this or that Math and the Maharaj there. Let us spend our time in more useful and purposeful pursuits. It is high time; we learn a lesson from these tragic incidents and realize how these schemers are exploiting us. After all we ourselves are responsible for our lives and put an end to exploitation.

4 March, 2004.



Lucky Stones

Many of us firmly believe that the planets affect human life on the earth; and also that the ill effect produced by them can be modified by using particular stones. There are people who claim to be well versed in discerning which planet will cause what kind of effect on different individuals and also which precious stones will give them relief. Particularly those people who believe in Astrology also assume that they need to wear a ring of some precious stone as advised by the expert to protect them from the ill effects of planets unfavourable to them. In order to avoid ill effects of the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn, astrology tells us, one should use ruby, pearl, coral, emerald, topaz, diamond and sapphire respectively. All these precious stones are quite costly and beyond the reach of the common people. Since the planets do not spare the common people our astrologers have found a way to bypass their ill effects. The way out which they found is to sell stones charmed with Mantras and make them propitious and bode well to the respective users. These stones are advertised in an eye catching manner through different news papers and even electronic media.

Such advertisements had disappeared a little while ago but they have started re-appearing again with vengeance. Sale of these contraptions seems to be in proportion to the harshness of the condition in which people have to live. The advertisements point out, "The common man faces monetary and other problems related to health and family matters. However those who use our lucky charmed stones possessing divine supernatural powers, easily overcome all these problems. We sell such valuable stones at affordable prices. Hurry up, buy our charmed lucky stones and leave your anxieties behind forever!" No wonder, the harassed common man is easily lured into buying these stones. For him getting a lucky stone at such a price is something unimaginable; so he spends some 25 rupees and secures a lucky stone for himself. In the

bargain he is exploited in two ways. In the first place the so called lucky precious stone that is sold for rupees 25 is worth no more than five paise. Secondly the stone has no divine power what so ever; for that matter, nothing in this world can ever have any supernatural or divine power because such a thing does not exist. Selling stones with supernatural powers is simply a big fraud.

One such fraudulent case had occurred in the city of Vadodara where such stones were being sold by the agents of an institution called, 'Patwardhan Astrological Institute'. Taking notice of this fraud the High court there ordered the institution to stop the sale. This incident had occurred 16 years ago and must have opened the eyes of those who easily fall prey to alluring advertisements and get cheated. But people have a very short memory; and the alluring advertisements have begun to appear with vengeance as pointed out earlier.

The so called providential stones!

Mr. Madhusoodan Patwadhan, the proprietor of the above institution was in the business of selling these lucky stones. He used to advertize his stones in a very arresting and eye-catching manner in the garb of scientific jargon as, “.... The vibrations that produce the ill effects of the planets form a kind of shield. But the charmed stones also produce vibrations which penetrate through that shield. Naturally those who use the rings made out of our charmed stones get automatically protected from the evil effects of the planets. ...” This language and this style are quite commonly used by those who are in the fraudulent business of selling useless articles and luring people into buying their worthless produce. In a similar fraud, a so called Japanese Mgnetic Bed was being sold. Advertisements of these beds asserted, “The magnetic field changes the velocity of the electrons. This change is necessary for removing the maladies of the body....” The stylish language used for advertisements is a web of pseudo-science spread to entrap people. What is not science in the first place is projected as 'Scientific', trying to convince people through deceptive arguments, that buying their wares is profitable. Patwardhan also used the same tactic to advertise his providential stones. He said, 'the stone that is favourable and propitious for your zodiac sign brings you good luck. Since this is based on scientific research, it applies to everybody irrespective of his or her religion, sect, caste, tribe, whatever.' This kind of spinning of words attracts common people easily. Moreover who will refuse to secure a favourable and propitious life just at the meagerly cost of twenty five rupees?

Mr. Patwardhan catered not only for the people of Vadodara; his business had spread to many other cities. In the year 1987, he sold his stones in an exhibition held in the city of Nagpur. But to his ill luck the consumer society there was alert and lodged a complaint with the Police Commissioner regarding this illegal business of cheating people. The case entered the high court under the 'monopolies and restricted trade practices act'. The inquiry committee investigated into the matter. Dr. G.N. Navaneet, the then director of the centre for Regional Sophisticated Instruments, University of Nagpur examined the stones Mr. Patwardhan was selling and found out that they were pieces of flint stones and no rays can emanate out of them.

In this connection, the Inquiry Committee gave notice to Mr. Patwardhan to appear before the 'Investigation and Registration Directorate' as a witness. It was proved that despite Mr. Patwardhan's claim the stones he sold possessed no supernatural powers whatsoever; he was selling ordinary pieces of stones for exorbitant prices and thereby exploiting people. He could not provide any evidence to prove that his stones had supernatural powers. But what was the real nature of the stones which he claimed were providential? They were pieces of agate not very valuable at all. A trader from Cambay (in Saurashtra), Sheikh Hakim Abdul Kadar Afikwala (what a mouthful of name!) sold agate stones of different colours to Mr. Patwardhan as cheaply as Rs. 20/- per 100 pieces, which he was selling at Rs. 20 per piece, i.e. with profit 100 times over. He used to tie a so called charmed piece of stone worth 20 paise round the neck of gullible people extracting twenty rupees from each of them. No wonder he became a millionaire in a short time at the cost of these superstitious gullible people.

Spreading superstition through the sale of stones

After examining all the formal papers, cross-examining the witnesses, and completing all formalities the honorable court delivered the judgment on 14th June 1989. The judgment is worth reading in details and ruminating over. Even the common people should mull over it as it is quite educative. At the end of this judgment the honorable judge has made an observation. Therein, he says, "..... It appears to me that the claims made by the respondent in the advertisement...are highly misleading. What he is selling are ordinary stones and he only exploits the credulity of common man and his faith in stars and lucky stones. He is promoting superstition and blind faith and discouraging a person from handling his problems in a rational self reliant manner. The adverse

effect of such advertisement on illiterate poor people which constitute a sizable portion of our country is too patent to need any elaboration. It is no doubt true that the respondent has held out “Money back guarantee”...which is itself a financial burden apart from the trail of disappointment that it leaves behind. I therefore hold that the respondent has indulged in unfair trade practices I am also of the view that the aforesaid unfair trade practice is prejudicial to public interest as well as to the interest of those persons who are taken in by the tall claims made by the respondent in respect to what he calls lucky stones.

I therefore.....direct the respondent to cease indulging in the unfair trade practices and not to repeat them. I also direct the respondent to pay cost of Rs.1000/- to the D.G, within two months from the date of this order.”

All those who are deceived by the attention arresting advertisements given by the wily dealers of the so called charmed stones should read this judgment. It will surely open their eyes and make them wiser.

Lastly we must keep in mind that there cannot be any stone, precious or otherwise that possesses supernatural power and can bring providential change in the life of anybody. One has to face one's difficulties and solve them with one's own efforts. This is the message that one should learn from this episode and never forget.

6 April, 2004



Vastushastra: an Antiquated Science

What is known as the Vastushastra was the ancient science of architecture. It was developed at a time when steel was scarce and cement unknown, when there was no plumbing, no electricity, no toilets or any other amenities of the present-day living. Yet a dabbler in that outmoded science of Vastushastra is generally consulted along with a modern architect while preparing plans for house. And invariably it is the architect who has to bow to the silly and superstitious nonsense of the so-called master of the antiquated science which, as in the case of all such sciences comprises “a few pearls in a big heap of dung.”

V .R. NARLA

The Science of God-Revelation

Ms Uma Kulkarni had written an article on the 'Philadelphia Experiment' conducted by Dr. Franklin Reno. This article had appeared in 'Shabdasohala' (a Marathi Magazine) on the 16th of October. The word 'Shabdasohala' literally means ceremony of words. The above experiment was allegedly performed on the ship named Eldritch, during the investigation into the 'Bermuda Triangle Mystery'. Ms Kulkarni has tried to explain the mystery that is supposed to have occurred, using scientific jargon. She explains, 'when as a part of this secret experiment, the time-plane under the influence of electromagnetic field was turned in some specific degrees, the ship disappeared; and when turned in 90 degrees the ship and the people on it lost all contact with life on earth. The ship and the things on it were wandering in different dimensions at that time. Narrow-minded persons trying to get out of that dimension jumped from the ship.' The writer alone knows what all this means but she adds even further, 'Some scientists believe that gods are beings, more advanced than human beings living on earth but living in another dimension. The dimension in which we live and the dimension of the gods meet when a specific time-plane occurs and at such occasions, things in that particular part are able to relate and become visible to one another. (This is when seeing god becomes possible.)'

The writer has thus tried to explain the so called 'science' behind the phenomenon of seeing god. She has used the scientific jargon such as-Einstein's Unified Field Theory, the formula for light, electro-magnetic field, nuclear rays, etc. to explain the so called scientific foundation of god-manifestation. People take such statements gilded in scientific terms to be authentic. But they are not. It is necessary here to examine such overbearing verbose statements made by Ms Kulkarni in her article and by others elsewhere, lest gullible people are fooled by them.

The information given by the writer regarding the Philadelphia

Experiment is a small part of a letter that Carlos Mingel Alende had written to an astronomer, Dr. Morris Jessup. Alende alias Carl Allen was a sailor on the Merchant Ship called Andrew Furuse. While working on this ship he saw another ship Eldritch, just disappearing from the sight; and as he reports, the same ship reappeared in the Norfolk region later. Actually he had made this statement on the basis of a news item that was published in a Philadelphia news paper. Allen had also said that during 1944-46, the Philadelphia news paper had reported that chicken hearted men jumped off the ship. (He did not give the exact date when the news paper was published.) A book, 'The Philadelphia Experiment' was published on this tragic incident in 1979. This book was written by two authors Barliz and Moor and sold like hot cakes. A news paper clipping of this tragic incident reported earlier was also published. However this clipping does not agree with any news item published in the Philadelphia News papers around that time.

Dr. Jessup, believing in what Allen reported examined the details of the Philadelphia Experiment. He found that the two ships-one on which Allen was employed and the other on which the Philadelphia Experiment was performed came closer to each other on 16th of August 1943 but never again. But Allen reported that he saw the Philadelphia Experiment ship disappear on 28th October 1943. Dr. Jessup's investigation reveals the fallacy in Allen's report.

Moreover more astonishing is the fact that no such thing as the Philadelphia Experiment was ever carried on, on any ship. This was made clear by the American Navy. The navy also affirmed, in no uncertain terms, that not only the Philadelphia Experiment but no such other experiment was ever conducted on any ship whatsoever. In short the much talked about Philadelphia Experiment that stirred the world of the scientists so violently was actually a cock-and-bull story. Isn't it ridiculous to discuss the inferences drawn from an experiment that was never performed as has been attempted by Ms Kulkarni?

Man has been wishfully dreaming for ages, of vanishment of objects into thin air and their re-materialization. Had the alleged Philadelphia Experiment really taken place and all the events described by Allen, the sailor and the authors Barliz and Moor, also had happened, man's age-old dream too would have materialized. Dr. Franklin Reno of the Philadelphia Experiment would have been awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize! But man's dream remained a dream. No Nobel Prize for Dr. Reno. The writers who picked up the idea and elaborated on it, however, made their fortunes!

These days, some people and some institutions have appropriated the right to uphold and conserve, revive and resuscitate our ancient Bhaarateeya Culture solely to themselves. Their aim is to win over and oblige people to accept old traditions and religious concepts. They manipulate and exploit science and scientific terms to gild the obsolete ancient ideas with modern look. Take the example of Agnihotra (maintaining a sacred fire). These self styled preservers of culture insist that Agnihotra is the only and also a sure remedy for cleaning our highly polluted atmosphere. But the fact remains that burning anything, whether sacred or otherwise is bound to emit carbon dioxide and cause pollution. Any chanting of Mantras to sanctify the material to be put into the sacred fire will not change this fact. These very people-out to preserve old traditions- had performed mobile Agnihotra, on trucks, during the Bhopal tragedy but had not cared to find out to what extent, if any, the pollution caused by the accident was reduced by the smoke stemming out of the Agnihotra. Another outlandish claim they make is that reciting the Gayatri Mantra generates certain Microwave frequencies in the body which is essential and very beneficial for human well being. One more amazingly incredible claim they make tells us in which particular direction we should perambulate round any deity. They tell us that auras get generated around all deities (i.e. the idols of the deities). These auras constantly rotate in a circle. We, therefore, should perambulate round the deity in the same direction of the auras i.e. from the right of the deity to its left. When we do this, some particles from the aura of the deity enter our bodies and protect us from all diseases. All this propaganda, misinforming people using scientific jargon, is nothing but treachery, fooling the gullible people. Has anyone ever examined the so called aura that gets generated round a deity? Similarly the avowal of existence of a range of dimensions on the earth, of existence of life or objects in those different dimensions, vanishing of a particular time-field around objects, etc. is again nothing but an extraordinary perfidy planted on the people.

4 Nov, 2005.



Cure for Ever Increasing Craze for Miracles

The Satyashodhan Yatra - an organized pilgrimage in search of truth - that started in Maharashtra entered Goa via Banda and Patradevi. It reached the Lohia ground in Madgaon on 14th December. There were three huge vehicles decorated with multicolour posters and boards on all sides. They carried messages exposing the rampant Buvabaji-a profession of deceiving people with fake spirituality. Many enthusiastic activists of the Maharashtra and Goa Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti participated in the programme of demonstrations of miracles in the presence of hundreds of spectators. These miracles were the same that the wily Baba-Buvas and the shrewd Maharaj perform to bear out their claim of having acquired divine, supernatural powers. The difference in their performance and that of the activists was that the activists made it a point to demystify their miracles by explaining the science or the sleight of hand behind every miracle; while the Baba-Buva-Maharaj tried to magnify the enigma to support their claim of divinity. The demonstrations, to name just a few, were: igniting a fire from a distance; taking out bangles from an unbroken coconut; obtaining holy ash or gold chain from the thin air; inserting the sharp blade of a sword into the stomach through mouth and pulling it out; passing a trident through the tongue; lying down on a thorny bed; pouring out pious waters of sacred rivers from an empty jug, etc.

The Baba-Buvas perform these same miracles to enhance their self proclaimed divinity. Religious and credulous people unsuspectingly believe in their pretense and are convinced of their supernatural and divine powers. The Babas and Buvas then keep exploiting them emotionally and materially. But when these common people see these marvelous phenomena, which they believed were miracles that only men of supernatural abilities could perform, and then come to know the science or the sleight of hand behind them they regain their lost self

confidence. They feel confident that they too can develop the necessary skills and perform miracles. The deceptive aura of divinity built around the Babas and Buvas vanishes altogether. This is what happened when the ANiS activists publicly performed, explained and demystified the Baba-Buvas' Miracles. Many of the Baba-Buvas were exposed and their aura of divinity completely wiped out.

Mortgaging good sense

In Maharashtra it is noticed that these Babas and Buvas can establish themselves better among illiterate people. In Goa literacy is widespread and illiterate people are fewer. There shouldn't have been any reason for the Satyashodhan Yatra to have come here in Goa. But it seems that here, in Goa keeping away from fraudulent Babas and Buvas is not related to illiteracy. The educated Goans living in cities too, like the uneducated rural masses willingly seek the Baba's advice and guidance for securing good fortune. Like the illiterate ones they too get inveigled by the Babas and the Buvas.

Life is full of difficulties. We are all beset with problems of ill health, the ever rising prices and short supply of essential things, unemployment and many other things. But instead of trying to overcome all these mundane difficulties with practical materialist solutions, many educated men and women believe that their Baba-spiritual guru can make their life trouble-free if they surrender to him. The sluggish mentality of quickly giving up without making any efforts and leaving everything to the mercy of god and his agents on the earth -the Buvas and Babas can be noticed much more frequently in Goa than in Maharashtra especially among the educated lot. Hence Goa needed the Satyashodhan Yatra as much as or more than Maharashtra. In his public speeches that he delivered during this period, Dr, Narendra Dabholkar called upon the people to break the shackles of mental slavery-of total dependence on the mercy of god and his agents- and start using their own intellect to overcome problems.

Parvati Ma and Satyasai

One more point that we cannot afford to neglect has to be discussed here. One 'Parvati Ma' from Bhavnagar used to claim that Bhagawan Shankar has blessed her with certain divine powers. Thousands of Goans visited Bhavnagar to see this Parvati Ma and get her blessings. She used to assure a childless couple that, as she laid her hand on the stomach of the childless woman a son will be born to them. But most of the devotees were disappointed as the promised son did not arrive. In another instance

of Buvabaji, the Gurav brothers from Kolhapur had established a roaring practice of eye treatment in Goa. As the treatment depended on the divine power with which these brothers were blessed, they were serving people free of charge, i.e., putting a few drops of charmed water in the eyes of each patient. All that the patient had to offer was just a coconut. The brothers collected several thousands of coconuts but the patients had no relief from their eye ailment. In another instance, thousands of people gather in the 'Believers' Prayer Meetings' where blind people are promised with good sight and lame ones of strong feet just by praying Jesus Christ. But neither did the sight of even a single blind man get restored nor did any lame fellow grow strong feet.

Such ridiculous beliefs and idle senseless stories make up the Spiritual Philosophy propagated by institutions calling themselves Sanatan Sanstha (meaning an institution of eternal ancient knowledge). They are spreading their tentacles all over Goa. They teach their disciples that the Guru is omniscient and omnipotent. One should never doubt or ask him any questions. If he commands a Brahmin woman to milk a dry buffalo, be sure, the buffalo will start milking profusely. Etc., Etc. They indulge in some petty conjuring and fool their audience pretending that they have miraculous, superhuman powers. The 'Nanij Sampraday' (sect) of Narendra Maharaj that is firmly rooted in the soil of the Konkan region is now spreading its tentacles in Goa. Satya Sai Baba who indulges in all sorts of big and small Magic tricks (publicized as 'miracles') could not secure a license for a petrol pump in favour of his brother. R.V. Janaki Ramaiya, his brother did obtain a license through influence but when it was exposed, had to surrender the same. Satya Sai Baba with all his supernatural powers could not restore it. Several young disciples were murdered in cold blood in the Ashram of this Godman. Despite knowing all these facts, the Goan devotees still worship and pray him; they never realize that there is anything anomalous in this behaviour of theirs.

Gamboling of the Doctorbapu (doctor turned a Baba)

Dr. Joshi an erstwhile medical practitioner turned Baba, started talking in spiritual parlance with his patients. 'No Doctor', he would tell them, 'would be able to cure your disease. I can assure you. I am altogether different. The god who is always awake in my heart, alone can cure it. But you will have to undertake some religious observances and ceremonies to achieve this impossible feat.' Etc. The long-suffering weary patient goes through all those rituals and observances recommended by the doctor with divine power, even incurring debt if

necessary. Then rumours spread that Bapu Maharaj (the doctor) reveals himself to his devotees in the guise of Shri Ram, Shri Krishna, Hanumant and other deities. People were then convinced that Bapu Maharaj was the very god incarnate. To-day a fountain pen with a picture of Bapu Maharaj on it costs Rs. 300/- A large number of devotees throng to buy the pens. The Paduka (impressions of feet on stone) of Bapu Maharaj are worshiped and the devotees- men and women-indulge in gamboling together wherein two persons hold each others' hands crossing them at their elbows and whirl round and round. On the stage, near the picture of lord Vyankatesh are placed two drums, five feet tall, for the devotees to put in their offerings. Nearby there is 'Papamoksha Kunda' (a basin of consecrated water capable of releasing a person of all his sins). The devotees perambulate round it with a sacred earthen brick on their head. More the perambulations better is the guarantee of achieving Moksha (deliverance). The Padukas of this same Bapu Maharaj have now been brought into Goa in procession in a great pomp and show.

In short Goa is now competing with other places where exploitation of gullible people by various religious sects goes on without hindrance. The shrewd manipulators of these sects enslave people mentally, astounding them with their miracle mongering. These Buvas-Babas-Maharaj -Matas lead their sects with a pompous show of spirituality. Next their pet disciples add adjuncts like Parampoojya (most revered), Trikaladnya (omniscient, knowing past, present and future), Maharshi (a great sage), etc. to their names. The great mesmerizing orator Rajaneesh, was promoted to become Acharya, Bhagawan and finally Osho step by step!

Another variety of these self proclaimed champions of worried humanity is the self declared experts of 'Awakening Kundalini' who claim that with their spiritual instruction and guidance one not only gets rid of all ailments but can even float in the air! To expose this claim of the Kundalini promulgators, the activists of the 'Satyashodhan Yatra' placed a Sadhu at the entrance of the exhibition ground. This Sadhu was sitting in Veerasan (a posture in Yoga) but without any support, just floating in the air. Seeing this Sadhu, up aloft, in mid-space, people were flabbergasted. But the mystery was solved for them, then and there by an activist explaining the material secret behind it.

Apart from the Sadhu floating in the air, the activists performed all other so called miracles which these Buvas and Maharajas usually perform to demonstrate their miraculous powers. They also explained

the science or the sleight of hand involved in every miracle. Every visitor returned wiser after seeing the exhibits of the Satyashodhan Yatra, convinced that none of the so called miracles need any divine or supernatural power but only a dexterous sleight of hand and some facts of science not commonly known or made use of. Datta Nayak focused the attention of the audience on this fact and pointed out that in order to understand the simple scientific facts and also the sleight of hand it is necessary to be always alert and questioning with a curious and inquiring mind. This will save all of us from being caught in the net of the so called spiritual powers and miraculous abilities of the sly and wily Babas and Buvas and from the intellectual slavery to them. This is the message, that the Satyashodhak Yatra aimed at spreading among the people and they undoubtedly achieved it with great success.

22 Jan, 2003.



Philosophy

Your philosophy determines the least of your acts and shapes your conduct. In Hindu Philosophy, the emphasis is all on your own mukti, your own moksha, your own salvation. What happens to others matters least to you. That is exactly why a Hindu is almost totally devoid of civic sense, of public spirit. While he keeps himself and his house fairly clean, he dumps his garbage on his neighbour's door-step and defecates on the public street caring two hoots for public hygiene.

A philosophy that is unrelated to contemporary life is no philosophy. It can only help idle men to while away their idle time.

A philosophy that is obtuse is no philosophy. It can only help one to indulge in intellectual gymnastics.

A philosophy that goes against the proven facts of science is no philosophy. It makes people highly superstitious if not positively idiotic.

V R NARLA

Utterly Unproductive Mahayadnya

In the Mudgaon city, some people have planned to perform a Mahayadnya in the third week of this month. The purported object of this Mahayadnya is the weal of Humanity as a whole. The sponsors also advocate that Somayag Mahayadnya, according to the Hindu Vedic Tradition, is the most powerful Yadnya that can bring about progress and prosperity to the society and the nation; the wealth that one donates for this Yadnya becomes pious, brings good progeny and plenty of rain resulting in plentiful crops. The Yadnya ceremony is going to last for five days and provision is made so that devotees can join the ceremony paying Rs.51000 to Rs.2500 for a day's attendance, according to what suits their pockets.

The scale on which this Yadnya ceremony is arranged makes one thing clear. Lots and lots of precious foodstuff like ghee, milk, best quality rice, sandal wood and many other cereals and pulses will be thrown into the Yadnya fire; number of Ritwija (Brahmins conducting the Yadnya) and hosts of the Yadnya and their relatives and guests will feast in the Yadnya Mandap (an open shed erected for festive occasion) for five days. Entertainment programmes too will cost quite a lot. All this totals up to an enormous amount of expenses. And what is it expected to achieve for the common man? Will it bring the promised progress and prosperity to the society and the nation?

The background of the Yadnya Institution

But before going into the fruitfulness of the Yadnya let us find out how congruous or reasonable performing a Yadnya in the present scientific age is. Invention of fire was a great revolution in the human life million years ago; as though man acquired a luminous power. Once the fire was lighted, it became necessary to keep it burning for, igniting it time and again was not easy then. Yadnya system seems to have evolved out of this necessity. Vedas consider the Yadnya rituals as means of

assuring material as well as spiritual well being. It was believed, in those days that Nature wields the power to make or break human life; and therefore, it became necessary to propitiate this power. The concept of Yadnya has its roots in this need to propitiate Nature. Man tried to propitiate the Deity of Nature offering it whatever he had with him. The ritual of offering for expected results is the Yatakriya. Every Yatakriya has its specific rituals and is expected to produce specific results. E.g. from the Putrakameshti Yadnya, in addition to a male progeny, rain, heaven, health etc. are expected. Different Yadnyas were conceived to propitiate various deities such as: Indra (rain and thunder), Agni (fire), etc. Yadnyas mainly consisted of religious rituals.

Casting a handful of rice, ghee, etc into the fire, while chanting Mantras, in order to invite Indra and other deities is an important part of the Yadnya ritual. This is called Samantrak Ahuti. Different things are cast into the fire in different Ahutis. There was a time when a Narmedha Yadnya was performed in which a human being was sacrificed. Yadnyas with animal sacrifice were quite common for a long time. All such heinous acts and some other loathsome practices were carried on in the name of religious rituals of the Yadnya. Man has now understood the nature of the supposed Natural Powers to propitiate which the Yadnya rituals were invented in the first place. Man has also succeeded to some extent in controlling them. E.g. he can summon the fire deity and make it do his bidding whenever he wants. He does not have to observe Samantrak Ahuti ritual for that. Just rub a match stick on any rough surface and the 'Fire Deity' presents itself before you to take your order.

We must think of the Somayag Mahayadnya that is planned in Madgaon against this background of the vast scientific progress man has made since the ignorant times when the Yadnya Rituals were invented. As said earlier a lot of precious foodstuff and other material are being collected for throwing into the fire. What relation does this burning of precious stuff and other rituals of the Yadnya bear with the well-being of humanity? Can the organizers of the Yadnya guarantee that the deities that are propitiated by burning such huge amount of stuff will reveal themselves in person to the devotees after the Yadnyas as promised in the Vedic concept? This is just not possible because no deity has so far revealed itself personally. Expecting such revelation is nothing but idle day dreaming. That is why Savarkar, known to be an ardent patriot had warned, 'These Yadnyas and Mahayadnyas invented in the ancient times to propitiate the phenomena and lifeless objects, considered deities out of the ignorance prevailing in those early days of development of the

human species should now be abandoned totally.'

During the Vedic period the priestly class alone knew all the Mantras and rituals to be observed in the Yagnas that were believed to be the only means of propitiating the deities to fulfill one's wishes. The priestly class therefore dominated the society. A priest was the most essential functionary in the performance of Yagna. Brahmins alone had the right to perform Yagna, the different functionaries of Yagna- the Ritwija or those who offered the Ahuti, etc. had to be born Brahmins as a rule; those who are born as Kshatriya, or Vaishya have no right to perform the duties of a Ritwija, so say the Smritis. But the times have gradually changed; and the Brahmins' monopoly of studying and acquiring knowledge has come to an end. The surge of knowledge in any field cannot be dammed now by restricting it to any religion, caste, sect, etc. Even the old Vedic literature has slipped out of the clutches of the Brahmins. Dr. Kale, an erudite pundit of Sanskrit language has launched coaching classes for students of all religions and castes in Goa to study Vedas and has proved that the study of the Sanskrit language and the Vedas can no more remain the monopoly of the Brahmin class.

Pseudoscience to shore up continuation of obsolete rituals

Some superstitious faithful from abroad and the indigenous orthodox who intend to revive the old obsolete rituals try their level best to seek support for the rituals by extolling their usefulness and good effects making use of scientific terminology. E.g. they claim that chanting the Mantras generate microwaves in the body that activate blood circulation which in turn provides the person with extra energy. It also generates super electrical particles that make the body healthy. To convince the innocent people they use English words in their sermons in vernacular to impress their audience. Awed by these erudite explanations the common people prefer to keep mum and refrain from examining the details of their statements.

The fact is that the Somayaga Mahayagna or any other Yagna for that matter is not capable cleansing the environment. On the contrary the claim of the Vedic orthodoxy of purifying environment cannot be sustained when scientific criteria are applied to verify the same. Whether cakes of cow dung or buffalo dung are used or whether the ghee used is extracted from cow's milk or from any other animal and whether the holy stuff used as Ahuti is made more holy and powerful by charms or not, the fact remains that whenever any substance is burnt, the process is bound to emit carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide etc. and consume oxygen from

the air. The Yadnya-Yag, therefore, instead of purifying the atmosphere, pollutes it all the more. Denying this scientifically proven fact is self deception and obstinacy. Thus in the present day, the Yadnya rituals are an utterly unproductive and meaningless practice. The wastage of foodstuff in such huge quantity, which will suffice the need of thousands of hungry poor, is quite alarming. The humanist outlook dictates that this wastage ought to be avoided at any cost. This humanist thought was promulgated and also put in practice by the ancient cultures too. Tarkateertha Lakshman Shastri says, 'the societies that practiced Yadnya rituals gave up the Hom (burnt offering) and the Yadnya practice or at least reduced the importance of these practices. The Yadnya system is the religion of a backward community. More enhanced cultures gave up Ydnya, animal sacrifice, etc. It is mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad that just as whatever is earned through your deeds in this world gets destroyed, the other worldly merit earned by practicing Yadnya too is destroyed. The Mundakopanishad in its harsh criticism of Vedik Rituals says that those fools who practice Yadnyas to earn merit get caught into the cycle of old-age and death repeatedly. These self proclaimed Vedik pundits are defeated again and again as it happens when blind men guide other blind men. The propounders of the Jain and the Buddhist religions became acutely aware of this anti-social aspect of the Yadnya system and objected to its continuation. The preference of system of prayers and worship over the Yadnya system is a sign of enhanced religious culture. The Bhagavadgeeta says that any Pooja Ritual can be successfully completed using leaves, flowers, fruits and water and offering these to god with sincere devotion.'

Ignoring all these words of wisdom, the fools as mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishada continue to organize Yadnyas even in the present days. Just a while ago, in the state of Kerala Putrakameshti Yadnya (Yadnya for begetting a son) was performed. The erstwhile Prime Minister, Deve Gauda, on the suggestion of an astrologer, performed a Mahayadnya at Chandarkur in the state of Karnatak so that he would retain his Prime Minister ship. Last January, a Lakshachandi Mahayadnya was performed in Kanpur. Thousands of Quintals of rice, thousand tons wood, several hundred tons of ghee and other precious food items were thrown into the fire. And what did all this super religious activity produce? The biggest pollutants carbon dioxide and carbon Monoxide in abundance! Nothing else. Not even a single couple could beget a child and Deve Gauda failed to retain his Prime Minister ship.

What the great Freedom Fighter Savarkar had said about these

Yadnya Culture, long ago, guides us even today. He had said, 'Yadnyayag is not capable of fulfilling any of your wishes; nor can it bring prosperity. This fact has been repeatedly proved throughout history or by evidence to the contrary. Stupid praising of the Yadnya System or other religious fire-worship are most impractical, religious fads that have grown out of utter ignorance. Serving the Nara (man) is serving the Narayan (God). Except this Yadnya -giving away in the service of man- all other Yadnyas that involve fire-worship should be given up altogether, for this alone is real Dharma (man's duty) and real Kartavya (task as a human being).'

16 Jan, 2001.



Superstitions and Religion

- *Superstition is child of ignorance and mother of misery.*
- *Miracles are not only impossible but they are unthinkable by any man capable of thinking.*
- *Ignorance is the soil in which belief and miracles grow.*
- *The man who cannot think is less than man, the man who will not think is a traitor himself, the man who fears to think is superstition's slave.*
- *Reason is the light, the sun, of the brain; it is the compass of mind.*
- *Priestly community produces nothing. They are parasites. They say: "Believe and give".*
- *The man who bows before an idol of wood or stone is just a fool as he prays to an imagined god.*
- *Religion cannot reform mankind because religion is slavery.*
- *Religion does not teach self-reliance, independence, manliness, courage, self-defense. Religion makes god a master and man the serf.*
- *Religion has always been the enemy of science of investigation and thought.*
- *Religion has never made man moral, temperate, industrious, honest and free. That man has never received any help from heaven, that all sacrifices have been in vain and all prayers have died unanswered in the heedless air.*

RG INGERSOLL

ESP: Extra Sensory Power

Shri Shivaram Barve from a Village in Dicholi often writes on various topics in the daily 'Navaprabha'. In one of his recent articles he has raised a question, 'can telepathy exist?' The curiosity and the quest of knowledge of this gentleman are admirable. Telepathy is considered to be one of the so called miraculous, supernatural powers; something divine and beyond mundane human abilities. Human beings all along believed that there are people who possess supernatural powers and can perceive things and phenomena inapprehensible to common people. They can describe or draw pictures of things not seen by them. This is called clairvoyance; knowing in advance what is going to happen in future is called premonition; e.g. seeing the death of a dear one in advance; knowing exactly what a person is thinking although he is far away is called telepathy and moving or bending things from a distance is called psycho kinesisis.

People are much interested in hearing about those who claim such supernatural powers. Even scientists are interested in the study and investigation into the claims of supernatural powers. However it was found that those who claimed that their studies confirmed the existence of supernatural powers were not beyond doubt. There were many flaws and errors in their investigations and experiments. Deeper and more detailed investigations proved their claims to be false. All investigations made by many scientists, in laboratories all over the world have failed to provide any decisive evidence to prove the existence of any supernatural powers of extra sensory perception (ESP). ESP therefore is not recognized as a branch of psychology. In every period of history of every culture, claims of contacts between people faraway from each others being established through ESP can be found. (Dr. Vartak from Pune is one such example. Not only does he claim to establish contact through ESP, but he also claims of being able to visit various planets in Sookshma Deha -the ethereal body or the sentient soul.) These claims are supposed

to be matters of religious chants and occult sciences. They, therefore, were not paid much attention.

It was in the latter half of the 19th century that attention first was drawn to ESP. In England the Society for Psychical Research was established in 1882. This was followed by the American Society of Psychical Research established in 1887. Many other countries too were interested in the investigation of this phenomenon and established their own institutions wherein reputed scientists participated in the research work. Some universities too undertook research in this field in support of these institutions. However all these efforts could not produce any conclusive evidence for the existence of ESP.

In order to study Telepathy as a science a specific method of study and research needed to be developed. Many methods were invented and used. But the one invented by the Psychiatrist Rhine is now used as a standard method. This method consists of cards like playing cards. A set is made up of 25 cards. Every card has one of the signs-square, star, cross, circle and line. This sign is printed on the card in black ink in thick and large size.

One of the persons giving this test, say A, sits in one room. The other person, B, who sends messages to A, sits in another room. It is ensured that these two will not be able to communicate with each other in any way. The person B is shown some cards and is supposed to convey to A what card he has. The number of cards A correctly recognizes is counted at the end. For the test of Clairvoyance the cards are kept on the table so that the signs on the cards are not seen. The person claiming clairvoyance is asked to tell the order of the signs on the cards. In the test for cognition, the person is expected to tell in what order the cards will get arranged after shuffling. But he has to predict the order before shuffling. Finally the results of the tests are compared and tallied. The results failed to prove the existence of ESP and the claims of Telepathy, Clairvoyance or Cognition were proved to be false.

Many books are written to prove the existence of ESP describing innumerable incidents for evidence. They take it for granted that ESP exists and extol the supernatural powers possessed by those people who make a claim to such powers. But experts have raised many doubts regarding the authenticity of the happenings and personalities described in these books.

19 July, 2005



Temple Building: Lucrative Business

A member of the cabinet of Manohar Parrikar withdrew his support from the Government. He was accused of extracting commission from various contractors. He had built temples at many places with his ill gotten riches. While criticising the wily ways of this minister, the Chief Minister Mr. Manohar Parrikar stated, 'Utilizing the ill-gotten wealth for building temples does not secure any 'Punya' (moral or religious merit) for the builder.' The Chief Minister deserves to be congratulated for publicly stating the stark truth. His statement, however, seems to assume that temples are built for accumulating religious merit. There was a time in the Peshava Period or somewhat earlier, in the history of Maharashtra, when brave warriors and pious women like Ahilyabai Holkar built temples with the intention of acquiring religious merit and also serving the needs of the people. But in the present day the temple builders and builders of prayer houses do not aspire to gather 'Punya'. Their aim and object is simply and solely making money.

Recently Mr. Sharad Bedekar a progressive writer wrote an article on temple building, throwing light on how the illegal business is quietly carried out. It has become a lucrative business for the unemployed men. This is how the business starts. To begin with, an idol of a revered deity is placed under a Banyan tree or at the bend of a road. Alternatively the picture of the deity or the picture of a much revered saint is hung on the wall, at a suitable place which is much frequented by passersby. The surrounding place is cleaned up and the deity or the saint is worshiped with flower garlands, burning lamp, frankincense, etc. This makes way for building a small dome or cupola over the deity. Next the surrounding area is tiled even encroaching upon the road. No one objects. Gradually the dome is converted into a small and later a biggish temple. No law can come in its way. Thus one more dwelling is offered to the god who already has several of them in addition to his heavenly abode. Likewise a

Darga, a Mosque or a Church also can be built at any street corner. One, who constructs the edifice, naturally becomes its owner and can carry on his business unhindered. No education, no other qualification and no license, nothing is necessary to start the business.

Many dilapidated temples spread over the countryside need to be renovated. The devotees in the surrounding areas are keen to get the job done. Some shrewd people readily take the initiative and not only renovate the old structure but also extend it. Then they make a trust for the bigger and renovated temple, reserving all the rights regarding the temple with the trustees i.e. they themselves and their progeny after them. Rumours are spread that the deity is 'Jagrit' (awake, attentive and heedful of the devotees' needs). So and so became prosperous because of the deity's blessings; some other person got a son after praying the deity and still another was absolved of the criminal charges made against him, etc. The rumours swell as they pass from person to person and the deity becomes proportionately popular, multiplying the temple's income. Owning a temple has become a symbol of prosperity like owning a modern commercial complex. It is also a symbol of one's status, prestige and influence. Highly ambitious temple builders use the popularity and the influence earned through the temple, to dig their feet in the political arena. The devotees, on the other hand who make the temple prosperous are not necessarily well-to-do. The irony of the god getting richer at the expense of his impoverished devotees is very common in our country. It never occurs to any devotee to ask a logical question why his god chooses to keep him in poverty while he (the god) becomes richer by the day. The Saibaba of Shirdi who wore only tattered clothes while he was alive, now owns a crown of diamonds. One thing is clear that more and more novel religious programmes and ceremonies are conducted every year creating a lot of hullabaloo in celebration of the deity providing some entertainment to the common people.

Goa is not an exception to the rest of India as far as the illegal temple building is concerned. The modus operandi of this business also is the same as elsewhere. As in other places it begins with erecting a small dome over an idol of a popular deity. No one takes any objection to the construction as the place is public. When the construction is complete the dome is opened for the public to have a glimpse of the deity inside. The opening ceremony is accompanied by a religious-cultural programme. Some great preacher is invited from Mumbai for 'Pravachan'- spiritual enlightenment of the devotees. Important people- the Sarpanch, members of the legislative assembly, ministers- attend the programme

and partake of the lunch in the company of the temple builder. Next day, the news of the ceremony is flashed in bold letters on the front page, praising the host of the ceremony. The business begins to earn profit.

Devotees regularly visit the deity and leave some money at its feet. If the idol under the dome is that of Datta, the devotees of Datta throng on Thursdays; to have a Darshan of Shivashankar, his devotees queue up on Mondays. For the Ganesh idol huge crowd gathers at the dome on Mondays and Tuesdays. On the days of Vinayaki and Angaraki, to control the crowd of devotees of Lord Ganesh near the dome, police have to be called in. The same scene can be seen on Saturdays if the deity under the dome is Hanuman. In short there is no dearth of devotees of every god at least on one day of the week. There is a constant flow of cash in front of the idol under the dome. Accumulation of cash is likely to be accompanied by trouble. So in order to avoid any likely incident, the shrewd owner hires a few tough guys and secures his steadily increasing income. Soon the dome becomes a place of religious conviction and loyalty. Some over enthusiastic devotees invent primeval antiquity of the place and the idol under the dome. This belief makes the idol and the dome immune to being removed from their position occupying public place. The owner gives a sigh of relief.

Now this 'Jagrit' deity and the dome of antiquity becomes a hindrance even if Government needs the space for any project of public interest. The government has to pay the owner of the dome a sumptuous amount as compensation. Thus this sturdy law breaker who has encroached upon a public place, in the first place, is rewarded instead of being penalized. What kind of justice is this? It thus encourages the lucrative glib business of temple building practiced by the unscrupulous vampires in the society. The small state of Goa consists of only two districts. It is not, therefore difficult to find out these unauthorized temples and prayer houses; but no attempt seems to be made in this direction and the temple building business flourishes without hindrance.

In many cities these temples are built in the vicinity of the bus depots where many passengers gather. Concrete embankments are built around the trunks of huge trees in this area and the spots are then converted into religious places of worship. Every week on the day of the deity of these places, mikes blare out devotional songs from early morning till late in the night. The mike owners have no regard for the charm and grace of the art of Music and throw all restrictions of volume to the winds. Louder volume makes better music according to them. The residents of this area are at the receiving end of this 'Tamasha'. The noise pollution is harmful

to their health; students find it difficult to concentrate on their studies; and yet no steps are taken to remove the site of worship from its place. A lame excuse of respecting the religious feelings of the people is offered to defend the inaction. The real reason is to keep the vote-bank of the devotees and the support of the temple builder intact.

It is true that utilizing the ill-gotten wealth for building temples will not secure any 'Punya' for the builder nor will it absolve him of his 'Pap' (immoral deeds). But here it is necessary to impress on the authorities that it is equally true that removing the unauthorized temples from the public places that they illegally occupy is no 'Pap', no sin or crime. The Rajarshi (sage-King) Shahu Maharaj, an extraordinarily brave man was acutely aware of this fact. A number of such prayer houses were erected in a disorderly manner at all nooks and corners of roads in Kolhapur before he ascended the throne. On realizing that these illegal constructions hinder the smooth flow of traffic, he decided to raze them all to the ground. The wise king knew that the religious leaders will oppose the move. One night, he invited all the heads of these prayer houses for a meeting in his palace to discuss the issue. While the discussion was in full swing within, outside the palace, all the prayer houses were, in the quiet of the night, razed to the ground. Sadashivrao Barve, the Commissioner of Pune, during the British rule, utilized the same tactic and erased all the Dargas, Mosques and temples on the roads that obstructed the traffic. Why can't it be done in Goa? But for that to happen the idle talk of spirituality and sins and merits ought to be stopped and priority ought to be given to public interest and public benefit. But where is the political leadership that is necessary to do this?



Sinister fairy tale

I am not even an atheist so much as I am an antitheist; I not only maintain that all religions are versions of the same untruth, but I hold that the influence of churches, and the effect of religious belief is positively harmful. Reviewing the false claims of religion, I do not wish, as some sentimental materialists affect to wish, that they were true. I do not envy believers their faith. I am relieved to think that the whole story is a sinister fairy tale; life would be miserable if what the faithful affirmed was actually the case.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

The Non-Existing Bhanamati

It is very strange that in the days when science is advancing by leaps and bounds, some of us still believe that Monstrous Powers like 'Bhanamati' still exist and can cause trouble. People during light conversations indulge in making much ado about concepts like Bhanamati and spread exaggerated rumours of Bhanamati or such other incidents. Simple naïve men and women believe them. They never feel the need to verify whether those tales have any truth in them. They avoid all this mental exertion and rather prefer to believe what they are told. However there are a few who demand to know more and take the trouble to ask questions and investigate to unearth the truth. They feel the need to know what Bhanamati is and whether such a thing can exist.

Bhanamati is a kind of legerdemain or conjury practiced for duping people. Let us try to understand how such concepts develop. When the great apes evolved into human race, the newly evolved human being still continued to live in the wild rustic conditions. He did not know the cause of any natural phenomena nor could he imagine that there ought to be a cause for what happens. But soon he started using his intellect to relate incidents and causes. Quite often his immature intellect led him astray. He conceived that during an eclipse some monstrous powers swallow the Sun and to ward off these powers, he beat drums as loudly as he could. He conceived the thundering of clouds in the sky as the noise made by the evil powers while grinding grams. The lightening in the sky seemed to him as lashes when the charioteer of Indra whipped his horses. He called these invisible powers of the nature 'Yatu Shakti' (magical powers). The word 'Jadu' meaning magic is a corrupt form of Yatu. Man in his primordial wisdom, thought that Yatu Shakti ought to be propitiated and so started worshipping it. But as the time passed his curiosity regarding the causes of natural phenomena increased. And so did the knowledge that was obtained out of necessity. The process continued to progress steadily

and gradually divulging the mysteries of the imaginary Yatu Shakti. But the pity is that even after knowing many secrets of the Natural Powers, many tribes still continue to propitiate and worship the Yatu Shakti. Aghori (monstrous) rituals are adopted to worship the supposedly Aghori Yatu Shakti. This sect therefore is called Aghori Panth (Monstrous Sect).

There is a chapter on Rudra in Yajurveda which contains a stanza wherein Shiva is called Aghor. Shiva is worshiped as Aghoreeshvara in Karnataka even today. This relates the Aghori Sect to Shiva Sampraday. To join the Aghori Sect one has to be initiated into it by a Guru. The Diksha (initiation) ceremony consists of many filthy and monstrous rituals that include partaking of human urine and feces, and eating human flesh as an obligatory part of the Diksha. All these rituals are absolutely necessary to propitiate and subdue the Aghori Shakti. Tantrik-Mantriks perform these rituals in the hope of mastering Aghori Vidya which people think gives them the power to kill their enemies. Undertaking penance to obtain Aghori Power does not, however, develop any faculty. Nor do the magical rites and rituals help kill anyone or revive any dead person to life. The rites only help the sham Tantrik-Mantriks to scare gullible people and fleece them. It is their regular business to earn a livelihood.

The Aghori Sect was notorious for the heinous crimes they used to commit. These thugs used to seize travelers tighten a handkerchief round their necks and kill them. These atrocious acts perpetrated by the Aghoris were brought to an end by the British rulers. They started convicting and hanging these Aghori Thugs. Finally the Thugery of the Aghoris was routed out. Formerly some Aghori Muslim Magicians were famous for their 'Rope Trick'. They used to begin their show in the twilight of the evening. The chief magician used to cut off limbs and head of the person from his gang who had climbed the rope that magically stood erect and throw them on the ground. The spectators from villages would be terribly frightened. They never knew that in reality the head and the limbs thrown from the top of the rope were not those of the person who had climbed up the rope but of a monkey, severed and painted to look like those of a human being. The rope too was not an ordinary flexible one but a stiff one with iron wires cleverly hidden inside it.

In those days, people in power also believed in the extraordinary abilities of witches and Fakirs. Sardar Bhosale of Nagpur had actually recruited a gang of witches and Fakirs to lead his soldiers into the battle

field. The British troops shot down the Fakirs who were leading the Maratha soldiers. The witches who followed the fakirs seeing the gravity of the situation ran away for their life instead of using their extraordinary powers against the British. They were not able even to save themselves. No wonder, Bhosale was defeated. This was bound to happen because the supposed Aghori Powers did not exist then; nor do they exist now.

Same is the case with another imaginary power called Bhanamati. It commonly means sorcery or black magic that hurts people. Incredible things happen because of it. Clothes drying on a string suddenly catch fire; objects in the house start moving of their own accord; furniture moves from its place; vessels on the rack fall down; during the night stones fall on the roofs of houses in the villages. No one knows who does it or from where the stones come. All these instances are categorized as Bhanamati. Is there really any invisible power as Bhanamati capable of doing such things?

It is a matter that needs to be investigated. But while looking into these happenings Newton's Theory of Motion should be kept in mind. According to this theory nothing can be moved without applying any physical or material force. Another natural law also has to be considered here. This law states that matter can be transformed but not destroyed. The corollary of this theory is that nothing can materialize out of nothing. With these laws in mind, we can infer that the stones that fall on the roof top of a house do not materialize out of thin air but arrive there from somewhere else. Similarly there is no invisible power Bhanamati or any other magical power behind their being pelted. There ought to be a physical force (e.g. human hand, etc.) that causes the pelting. So it is necessary to approach this problem fearlessly and investigate diligently to uncover the source of the physical force behind the pelting of stones.

But most of us are scared of ghosts and sorcery and in the face of danger, rush to seek shelter and avoid investigating into the cause of the trouble. We prefer not to find out who is behind the stoning of our house and leave it to the professional Bhagat at considerable cost. This reminds me of one such incident of Bhanamati that took place in Thane about 50 years ago. It happened in an old Wada (a large and spacious edifice like a mansion). Once at midnight all of a sudden stones started hitting the roof of the edifice. Everybody- the owner and the tenants-was scared. This continued for ten days. In the midnight the edifice was regularly stoned. Finally some young men decided to track down the culprit. They hid themselves in front of the Wada one night. As usual at one O'clock stones started coming on the roof. The leader of the youngsters threw the bright

light of a torch they had with them and noticed that a young man was running away. They ran after him and caught him. A couple of slaps on his face were enough to make him reveal why he was doing what he did. He told, 'the owner of the Wada made me slog for long hours and even beat me.' This confession completely demystified the Bhanamati.

Similarly the incidents of clothes catching fire all of a sudden, getting black crosses on the body or on the clothes, etc are not any black magic of Bhanamati but are the deeds of some person who knows a little about some chemical reactions. Such a person is invariably a frustrated one and wants to revenge the harm done to him by others. Some years back there were a number of Bhanamati incidents in the state of Karnataka. The Government there appointed a commission to inquire into the matter. The erstwhile vice chancellor of the University of Bangalore, Dr. H. Narasimhaiyya headed the commission. Among the other members there were some Psychiatrists. The commission investigated into hundreds of cases of Bhanamati and concluded, 'No such power as Bhanamati exists. All the cases of the so called Bhanamati were related to physical or psychological disorder.' This considered opinion made on the basis of thorough investigation of hundreds of Banamati cases by these learned men should put an end to the superstitious concept of Bhanamati, its magic power as well as the terror caused by it.

24 March, 2005



n the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And an outstanding reason for choosing some sort of God or spiritual-type thing to worship--be it J.C. or Allah, be it Yahweh or the Wiccan mother-goddess or the Four Noble Truths or some infrangible set of ethical principles--is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.

DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

Vastushastra: A Gimmick to Create Fear Psychosis

'Vastushastra' a scary thriller produced by Ramgopal Verma was exhibited in several cinema houses in Goa recently. The story of the picture in short is as follows: Mr. Rao and his wife shift into their new bungalow, 'Shanti Kutir' (meaning a cottage of tranquility). It is built exactly as prescribed in the Vastushastra (ancient Indian system of house building). The bungalow however proved to be inauspicious for the couple because it was haunted by a ghost. The spectators do not bother to think why the bungalow should be haunted when the owners perform all the prescribed religious rites and rituals before entering it. The reason is simple. People want to enjoy the kick that they get from horror while safely sitting in a well cushioned chair in an air conditioned theater. Affluence generates the need for a kick and it is a done thing these days to see horror films. This is horror for entertainment created by the film makers.

But there is another class of experts- the astrologers, the pundits who prescribe and conduct religious rites and rituals and there are also Vasushastris -who all create a fear psychosis in the society so that they can fatten their purses. They intimidate people telling them- devotees who visit the Math less frequently than is necessary will suffer from some calamity; when the planet Saturn beholds one with a malignant eye, his family is bound to go through a very bad patch; the tranquility of a household is destroyed; the harmful rays of the Shaligram (a black stone found in the river Gandaki and worshiped as Vishnu) from the small shrine in your prayer house creates disharmony in the family; and so on and so forth. They thus create a fear psychosis and exploit their victims.

Vastushastra is one more tool of creating fear psychosis that has come into light during the last 10 to 12 years. Vastushastra has nothing in common with Sthapatyashastra, i.e. Architecture, a science that is studied systematically in the colleges. Yet the Vastushastris- those who

claim to be Vastushastra experts- pose as equals of the qualified and trained architects and carry on their business of befooling people. In India we have a number of spiritual institutions which try to free people from their addiction by conducting devotional programmes. The Vastushastris impress the leaders of these Adhyatmik Sampraday (spiritual sects) and use their Bhaktipeeth (platform of devotion) for peddling their own programmes on Vastushastra. Introductory classes, seminars etc. are arranged from these platforms making Vastushastra not only an ancient science but also a sacred religious proposal. Through their smooth talks they convince people that building or renovating one's dwelling according to this 'ancient science' is beneficial while ignoring the precepts of the Shastra can bring any amount of difficulties and unhappiness in the family. Gullible people are taken in and coerced into consulting them. The consultation and the changes recommended by the experts in Vastushastra cost a lot. This is economic as well as mental exploitation. It is necessary therefore to understand what this so called ancient science is and whether there is any truth in the tall claims made by its advocates regarding its benefits and the dire consequences of ignoring it. In the Vedic period constructing an edifice- be it a house or a palace- was a sacred pursuit or task accompanied necessarily by religious rituals and rites. The dimensions of the edifice, the quality of the soil, its slope, etc. were seriously taken into consideration as per the guidelines given in the Rigveda. In those days houses primarily were made of wood. A house or even a palace rested on huge columns made of wood. Much of the jargon used in Vastushastra can be found in the Atharvavedic Suktas. We find suggestions regarding house building mentioned in the Aitareya and Shatapatha Brahmanas.

Set of rules rejected by Science

In those days baked bricks were used for building houses. The construction process gradually improved and developed into a discipline- Vastushastra in consonance with the construction theories of Grihasootra. Many religious rites that ought to be performed while building a house are described in the Grihasootra along with some common principles of construction. These principles offer guidance regarding choosing the land, constructing the rooms, direction of the doors, the trees that should surround the house, etc. In the Ramayan and the Mahabharat tomes we find mention of huge edifices that were supposedly in use in those days. In some ancient volumes on Vastushastra issues like-auspicious and inauspicious moments for commencing any good job, proper choice of land, propitiating evil

powers there, etc. are discussed. Also considered are the eight dimensions and the asterisms or lunar mansions. The slope of the land, direction of the wind, nature of the soil and proximity of water resource are also attended to.

But when you come to the set of rules about actual construction prescribed in the ancient Vastushastra and ponder over whether those rules can be applied to the building and construction works of the present times you find that they are of no use today. The times have changed and so is our lifestyle. In the ancient days houses were not separate but joined to each other, side by side in a row. In this condition if the houses are facing south, there is the problem of ventilation. Today the architects have to build houses according to the set of rules recognized and made obligatory by the government. These rules are based on scientific principles and significant issues such as ventilation, health, safety, fire, earth quake, etc. are adequately addressed in them. During the construction, care is taken that the sitting room and the bed rooms are in the direction of wind. A safe corner is provided in the kitchen for the gas cylinder. Exhaust fans are provided in the kitchen to take away the polluting smoke, gases and odors.

These days we get clean tap water in our houses which is already filtered. The refrigerator helps preserve cooked food. So the direction of the wind with regard to the kitchen or the location of water source and such other things cannot now affect our health. In short, the house or a flat in a building that is built in accordance with the recognized principles of constructions and government approved rules and regulations are well provided with amenities and completely safe. And yet the Vastushastra experts allege that a dwelling complete with all amenities and precautions of safety is not 'propitious'. On what basis do they condemn the modern houses and flats? They are illiterate as far as principles of architecture and laws of construction are concerned. The basis is their own presumption of having acquired divine powers to predict whether the dwelling is auspicious or not for a particular occupant. Nowadays to have a spiritual guide as a 'family Guru' is in fashion in almost all strata of society but more so among those who can afford the Guru's costly counsel. The omniscient Guru cum Vastushastra expert suggests remedial changes in the building which the disciples carry out in their houses. He tells to break down part of the kitchen, shift a door from here to another place, rearrange the furniture in the drawing room, etc. All his instructions are carried out offering (not paying consultation fees) a sumptuous amount as 'Dakshina'. The regular Vastushastra experts

charge fees for their advice. All this sounds very practical and logical to those who willingly suspend their judgment for they seem to conduct all their other daily chores quite sensibly.

Do creative architects consult Vastushastra experts?

Certain windows of the house are permanently closed on the instructions of the Vastushastra Expert to block the fiends from entering the house. How can the non-existing ghosts enter the house whether the windows are open or closed? How can rearranging furniture improve health or relocating the water tank purify the water in it? These questions do not occur to the believers of Vastushastra, for they have surrendered their intellect to these self styled experts.

These days the Vastushastra experts have started using scientific language to convince their preys so as to impress them. The original Vedic language has metamorphosed into modern scientific jargon. E.g. the Vastushastris will now tell us, 'on reciting the 'Parjanya Sootra' cumulus and nimbus clouds gather in the sky. When the rice coated with ghee made out of Cow's milk is thrown in the Yadnya fire it affects the atmosphere and cleans the environment. Agnihotra therefore ought to be performed daily. More so, when the environment is being polluted by modern ways of life.' Common people are impressed by these beguiling words. Here are some more pearls of wisdom strewn by the Bhikshuks (those who perform rituals for the hosts to earn their livelihood) and astrologers to befool the naïve believers: The Prasad of Satyanarayan emits infrared rays which help maintain perfect health; to avoid the evil effect of the planet Mars, it is necessary to use a precious stone that is propitious for that zodiac sign; The rays emanating from such stones engulf the body and thereby protect it from all sorts of evils; and so on.

Using scientific jargon certainly does not mean stating scientific truth. It is the deceptive language of pseudo-science invented by the phony Babas, fake Maharaj, cunning astrologers, and bogus Vaidus (quack doctors) with the sole aim of deceiving gullible people. Vastushastri is the latest addition to this list of swindlers. With the modern research in the architectural science, huge and very attractive edifices have been built in many countries. More are added every day. Mayasur (a daemon architect of the old) we are told had built a very attractive city, 'Indraprastha' in the ancient days. During the Jain, Buddha and Mogul periods many amazingly attractive edifices that astounded the world were built in our country. Walter Gropius, the visionary architect of our time, built the 'Total Theatre' in Germany. Seeing this

edifice is a onetime life experience. The two world renowned architects, Sir Edwin Luetens and Herbert Baker, have built the Rashtrapati Bhavan (the presidential palace) and the Sansad Bhavan (parliament house) in the capital Dilly. In the year 1960, a strong earth quake, measuring 6 on the Richter scale, shook Dilly violently. But not a scratch was seen on these two edifices. It should be noted here that all the above structures were erected in diverse historical periods without consulting any Vastushastris.

According to Vastushastra if a certain part of the structure happens to face certain direction, calamities like death of sons, death of wife, etc. strike the owner or the occupant; he is ruined financially, he loses mental peace and happiness in the family and so on. This is nothing but bullying the house builders into complying with the Vastushastri's instructions. Vastushastra stipulates the rules of allotting lands to people of different Varnas (classes). To the Brahmins goes the piece of land that is white, sweet to taste and smelling like ghee; red land with a pungent taste, should be given to the Kshatriyas (warrior class); black soil to the Vaishyas (traders) and the Shudras (the lowliest class) be given that piece of land that tastes bitter and smells like liquor. This is completely contradictory to our constitution, showing utter disregard to the values enshrined in it. The Vastushastra that tells us what is auspicious and what is not or what is beneficial and what is harmful is founded in so called divine or revealed knowledge and misleading concepts based on that unsubstantiated knowledge. The concept that a certain dwelling is not propitious to certain individuals is not only unscientific but is also harmful to the society and consequently to the whole nation.

2 Dec, 2004



Astrology

Men who attain unmerited success in acquiring a large fortune or high office or social position are generally the most fervent believers in astrology. Subconsciously they know their own inadequacies. How, then to explain to themselves their unexpected rise in the world? It can, they think, be due only to the lucky signs under which they were born. Such indeed is their dependence on stars, that some of them do not so much as stir out of their homes without consulting their almanacs.

V.R. NARLA

Row over Eradication of Black Magic Bill

Maharashtra has produced progressive thinkers like Mahatma Phule, Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. And yet Maharashtra has failed to get rid of superstitions. It is certainly as superstition ridden as many other states of India. There is enough of Buvabaji here. In the rural area there are Baba-Buvas-Maharaj and Devrishis (those who summon and exorcise gods and daemons) in addition. Dev-Devaski (inquiry conducted before an idol), Mantra-Tantra, Ghosts and souls of the dead and sorcery are found in plenty in our rural areas. These all are means of economic and psychological exploitation. A childless woman kidnaps the innocent child of the unsuspecting neighbour and sacrifices it in the hope of getting a child of her own on the instigation of some Baba-Buva. Greedy ones readily sacrifice a human being in search of buried riches. Distressed individuals are driven to committing such atrocious and heinous acts because of superstitions. Many progressive organizations in Goa, therefore, are striving to get a law banning superstition like the one in the state of Maharashtra ratified.

This law, Eradication of Black Magic, Evil Practices and Customs, which is quite appropriate because such a law will enable the state to rein in those who indulge in using exploitative superstitions like Bhanamati, Jadutona (black magic), Chetuk (sorcery), Dakin (accusing a woman of being a 'female fiend'), Bhutali (female ghost), etc. The law, if enacted, will compel those who claim divine powers to prove their claim scientifically or else face the consequences of breaching this law. Considering the benefits that can accrue from it, every strata of the society should have welcomed the law. Some organizations, instead, initiated a campaign of maligning the law and its sponsors, systematically propagating false information. As a part of this campaign they distributed printed pamphlets telling people, 'if this law is passed, it will make it impossible for a Hindu to participate in the Vari (yearly

pilgrimage to Pandharpur); visit the family deity in the temple; worship the Banyan tree; recite Mantras, Geeta, Dasbodh, etc. and undertake any rites, rituals or observances and pooja. Moreover they warn people if one dares do any of these he will be convicted under this law and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment and a huge fine.' This false propaganda is carried on in the name of the Hindu Religion with the object of instigating violence.

One organization calling itself a 'foundation committed to spiritual upliftment of society' has crossed all limits of calumny against ANiS and the law. They call the activists of ANiS heretics who are out to destroy Hidutva (self-esteem in being a Hindu.) Such venomous propaganda misleads the common people regarding the object of this law. Those who indulge in this malicious campaign either are ignorant about the details of the law or are intentionally and systematically trying to misguide and then provoke the gullible devout people.

Truth and non-violence are the two most cherished values of the Hindu Religion. The said law proposed by ANiS too has these two values at the core and provides to uphold and sustain them. ANiS as an organization values truth and non-violence as the most important principles. It intends to put a halt to the practice of animal sacrifice to appease deities. In India there are any numbers of fairs organized in the honour of some deity or other when animals are sacrificed. As was regarded in old days, animal sacrifice is still claimed to be an essential part of worship of these deities, without which the village deity or the Yadnya deity is believed not to be appeased. In Assam and West Bengal thousands of goats are sacrificed before Kali Mata. At times the way in which these animals are killed is unimaginably cruel. Although this killing is done in the name of worshiping a deity, the truth is that no deity and certainly not any Hindu deity demands blood and flesh of the dumb and innocent animals. The law proposed by ANiS upholds the two principals of non-violence and Truth and provides to ban animal sacrifice during such fares and elsewhere. The Hindus should be proud of this step which is so well in harmony with their cherished principles. Why should they object to the provisions made in this law with regard to banning of animal sacrifice?

As far as the fake Babas-Buvas are concerned, the great saints Tukaram and Ramdas had warned us all, to be wary of these deceitful characters, those selfish individuals who try to mislead gullible folks, more than 350 years ago. Tukaram Maharaj had said that 'these cheats grow long hair and make a show of being possessed. But they are not holy

men; and you will not find any signs of piety in them. They gather men and women round them and talk to them about good and bad omens to increase their self-importance.' Samarth Ramdas says, '(this cheat) feigns to be a pious man who he is not; he does not walk his talk; all that he does is pretense. He is under the influence of intoxicating drugs. Those who have become Brahma Roop are altogether different than these Baba-Buvas, they cannot be described in words.' ANiS carries further this movement of social awakening initiated by our saints and goes one step further; that step is enactment of this law- the law to ban exploitative superstitions and to indict the Babas and Buvas who exploit gullible people; it is a step to strengthen the movement of social awakening with the force of the law. When the law comes into force, torturing people physically or psychologically in the name of exorcising ghosts; pretending being possessed by a deity to exploit people and such other exploitative acts will be banned as criminal acts. Even after this if someone claims to possess divine power and perform miracles he will have to prove it scientifically or face the wrath of the law.

Take the example of the Putrakameshti Yadnya (Yadnya that promises a son). It is an established fact that the gender of the foetus is decided when the sperm penetrates into the egg and forms an embryo. No one can change it afterwards nor can anyone choose it beforehand. Yet there are some Maharaj who insist that performing a Putrakameshti Yadnya guarantees the birth of a son and exploit those who believe in them. These days a new form of propitiatory observance has been tailored for those couples who want to change the female embryo (with which the wife is already pregnant) into a male one. This special ceremony is called Gopal-santan-vidhi in which the hopefuls have to part with a large sum of thousands of rupees in advance. No need to say it is a pure and simple fraud exploiting superstitious people. The proposed law has a provision to indict the performers of the ceremony. Will anyone explain how this can obstruct religious performances or hurt religious feelings of the Hindus?

Some people, with vested interests, indulge in loud bellowing that 'the proposed law is against the Hindu deities and is intended to punish devout Hindus for their religious conduct and performances with rigorous imprisonment and heavy fine. They, in fact, use people's religiosity to shield their real purpose which is obstructing all socio-religious reform. Our constitution takes care of every individual's right to believe in and propagate any faith and achieve his own spiritual enrichment in accordance with his faith. So it is a constitutional duty of

every individual to respect the worship of god according to one's faith, provided that the worship is watchful and discerning and not done under duress or for some selfish purpose or under religious coercion and intimidation.

Some organizations blame the law accusing it of restricting the religious freedoms of the Hindu society. If they try to understand the law properly they will realize that their allegations are baseless. The fact is that throughout history every reform to eradicate any obsolete tradition that has become harmful to the society is opposed by some vested interests. When the inhuman tradition of Sati was banned by Lord Bentinck, our religious luminaries filed a suit in the Allahabad High court insisting that the British Government have no right to interfere with our religious faith and traditions and thereby let slip their intention to retain their license to burn widowed women alive. Whenever the society tries to progress the foundation of the established superstitions shakes and the orthodox religionists oppose the progress tooth and nail. All this was unavoidable in the olden days and remains unavoidable today. The tendency to cling to the religious superstitions hinders all progress. That is why the strength of the progressive people has to be augmented by the power of the law, to boost the movement of Social Reform.

13 Sept, 2004



Guru Craze in Western India

The drift towards obscurantism and vague fascination for all that is occult and against reason has led to blind worship of imposters even by a large section of educated people in this country. It was curious to note that reason played a negligible factor in guiding the actions of a vast majority of people. In spite of their education they were as gullible as the most ignorant villagers and chose to be driven blindly in the field of politics, religion and other matters by self styled leaders who claimed to have derived inspirations from mysterious sources. The increasing following of such cults as Theosophy, Vedantism and what for want of a better word, we may call Vivekanandism, is due to the same intellectual or "quasi" intellectual movement.

Dr. R. P. PARANJAPYE

Transit of Venus & Astrologers' Silence

The transit of Venus, a planet from our solar system, is a natural phenomenon. This happens when the planet passes directly between the Sun and the Earth and looks like a tiny black disk moving across the face of the Sun. Such a transit took place on the 8th of June 2004 and lasted for 6 hours. This is similar to solar eclipse by moon. The diameter of Venus is four times that of the moon, yet it appears smaller and travels more slowly across the face of the Sun, than does the moon during a solar eclipse, because it is much farther away from us than the Moon. The transit of Venus is the rarest of all predictable astronomical phenomena.

Transits of Venus occur in a pattern that repeats every 243 years. The transits are in pairs 8 years apart with the next pair separated by long gaps. One gap is of 125.5 years and the next gap of 105.5 years, thus making a cycle of 243 years. The last pair of transits was in December 1874 and 1882. The first of the pair of transits in the 21st century took place on 8th June 2004 as mentioned above and the next transit of the pair will take place on 6th June 2012. The subsequent pair of transits will occur in December 2117 and again in December 2125. Professor Shrikant Nagavekar has written an article on this astronomical phenomenon answering in details all the questions that arise in our mind regarding the curious pattern of the transits of Venus, its size compared to the Moon and also as to why it appears only as tiny spot moving across the disk of the Sun.

Astrologers' Silence

We find ample information regarding the Solar eclipse, Lunar Eclipse, the transits of the various planets from one sign to another through the Zodiac along with the inferences or good and bad effects of these natural phenomena (according to astrology) when they happen. But surprisingly no religious tome has ever mentioned the transit of Venus or its good or bad effects; right from the “Pancha-siddhantika”

(five theories) written by Varahmiheer in the ancient times to the recently written “Jotish shastra” by K.V. Somanshastri. It is interesting to know that Varahmihir was a great scholar of Iranian lineage. Those who make much ado about foreign lineage of people should keep in mind that the most revered astrological book was written by a Pandit of foreign lineage. Ajay Bhambi, an astrologer from Delhi and a few others like him did make some predictions regarding the transit of Venus; but their predictions are conjectures, which they themselves have drawn without support of any old scriptures. This means that all our ancient astrologers are silent about the transit of Venus across the Sun; for them it simply did not take place.

The fact is that nobody knew anything about this astronomical phenomenon of the transit of Venus till the year 1631. Innumerable transits must have occurred without being sighted by any astronomer or astrologer. Had the astrologers been aware of it, they certainly would have predicted their good and bad influences on the mortals and a long list of do's and don'ts during that period to propitiate the planet or redeem the Sun from the blemish. However from here onwards they will oblige us with their predictions as Ajay Bhambi from Dilly has already started doing. The business will continue as long as there are people who believe in the predictions of the astrologers. The old astrological books are cherished as religious scriptures by many believers who have no doubt regarding the predictions made on the basis of those books. However experience tells us that the predictions made by astrologers are not necessarily true like those made by astronomers because astrological predictions are not based on any scientifically conducted experiments or tests. They are not based on long and continuous observations; no experiments made and no inferences are drawn. They are simple conjectures made in the absence of experiment, observation, inference and conclusions drawn on the basis of this long process. Believing in such baseless conjectures is simply deceiving oneself.

The results of the recent parliamentary elections prove what we have said about the astrological predictions above. Most of the nationally recognized astrologers had predicted that the BJP led National Democratic Alliance that was in power would win more than 300 seats, while the Congress led front will get not more than 100 seats. They also predicted that Atal Bihari Bajpei will certainly get a second term as the Prime Minister and Sonia Gandhi and the Congress will suffer very badly at the polls; in addition, they had predicted that the Congress Party and the reputation and pre-eminence of the Nehru-Gandhi lineage will be

completely destroyed. All these predictions were made after a thorough study of the horoscopes of Atalji and Soniyaji and after making and studying horoscopes of their respective parties-the BJP and the Congress. It should be noted here that, for once, all these learned astrologers had arrived at a common conclusion!

However, sadly enough, they all were proved wrong; that too in almost all of their predictions. Atalji did not become the Prime Minister; Soniyaji did not lose the election; she, on the contrary refused the Prime Minister ship respectfully offered her by the Congress men and elevated the Nehru-Gandhi name to a new height by her sacrifice. At the same time all the famous astrologers who were berating the Nahru-Gandhi family through their pen with vengeance were thoroughly exposed. A glaring illustration of the bluff of astrology is the defeat of Murali Manohar Joashi, the Minister of Human Resource. Joshiji's faith in astrology is unshakable. To be true to his faith, he proposed to introduce Astrology as a scientific discipline to be studied at the University level in the name of "Jyotirvidnyan". Before proceeding to the electoral office to fill his form as a candidate from Allahabad, he made sure that the time, the Tithi (the lunar day), the Nakshatra (Lunar mansion) were all auspicious for embarking on his mission. But when the results of the election were declared, it was revealed that Joshiji, the staunch believer in astrology was utterly let down by his stars. And so were the much acclaimed astrology and astrologers.

The quacks and the astrologers

The astrologers themselves do not believe in their own predictions. There may be only a few exceptions; but to make their predictions palatable to their customers they talk in a very ambiguous language so that their statements can mean many things at the same time. They make statements such as, 'The Sun is very propitious in the horoscope but the Saturn can cause such difficulties that cannot be ignored. So success of Kamalnath (or any other customer) really depends on the difficulties created by Saturn, etc.' Now, irrespective of whether this said Kamalnath wins or loses, the astrologer's prediction is bound to be proved correct. In fact the language he uses proves him right, always. There is something common between the two professions- quackery and astrology. And that is dishonesty and cheating. A quack uses phony medicines and deceives his patients while the astrologer deceives the customer with his predictions devoid of any scientific basis. The quack can be punished under the existing laws but the astrologer escapes because of the loopholes in the law.

Astrology tells us that the nature of an individual- his virtues and defects - is determined by the influence of the planets on him. The influence of the Sun, the Moon and the Jupiter makes a person 'Satvaguni'- imbibing the principles of truth, intellectual light, moral goodness, etc. i.e. all the human virtues. The influence of the planets Mercury and Venus makes a person 'Rajoguni'-given to passion and sensual desire, worldly coveting and pride. The influence of Mars, Saturn and Rahu and Ketu makes a man 'Tamoguni' -having the traits of darkness or blinded with lust, anger, pride and ignorance. According to these traits, a person indulges in good or bad deeds. Here the logic of the astrologers goes berserk. First of all only man can decide whether whatever he does is good or bad. No other animate or inanimate thing is capable of making such a decision. The planets, which according to astrologers, determine the nature of man and what he does in accordance with his predetermined nature, cannot make any decision as to whether a certain deed is good or bad. They are millions of kilometers away from the earth and are made of gigantic but inanimate rocks. To conceive that such inanimate rocks can influence the behavior of men and women of earth from huge distances is not only irrational but also ludicrous.

Tarkateertha Lakshmanshastri Joshi, an eminent scholar has resolutely declared that astrology is no science. Pandit Mahadevshastri Joshi had studied many tomes of Astrology. But the day, he was convinced that astrology is not a science, he gave up his occupation of a professional astrologer although that was his bread and butter at that time; not due to the planetary influence but due to his intrinsic truthfulness as a human being! Those who make their fortunes by making unfounded and unjustified predictions can hardly afford such honesty and integrity. So they insist that astrology is a science. It is a harebrained dogma and an art of swindling the customer with a glib tongue.

11 June, 2004.



Nothing shall warp me from the belief that every man is a lover of truth. There is no pure lie, no pure malignity in nature. The entertainment of the proposition of depravity is the last profligacy and profanation. There is no scepticism, no atheism but that. Could it be received into common belief, suicide would unpeople the planet.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Shastriji Closes his Astrology Shop

Recently a seminar on Pandit Mahadevshastri's entire literature was organized in the Arts Section of the Institute of Menezes Braganza in Panaji. Professor Krishnaji Kulakarni presented a paper on the autobiographical writings of Panditji in his unique style. There he mentioned that, 'Shastriji opened an Astrology Office but he could not continue in the profession successfully.' Professor Kulkarni however did not mention what was the cause of his shutting down. The audience naturally would deduce that Shastriji had to shut down for lack of adequate study of the discipline. But the fact is that Mahadevshastri Joshi had completed the study of all available tomes in astrology while he was still a student in the Veda Shala of Sangli, only after which he had opened his office in Goa. And still he was not successful in his profession, why? What could be the reason?

The reason can be found in Shastriji's 'Atmapuran' - his own story told by him. In that book he says that he asked one astrologer who was doing quite well, the secret of his success. His reply was very interesting. Said he, "See if you go about making predictions on the basis of what is said in the tomes, you are lost. What you need in this profession is a clever blend of idle words. Predict only what your Jatak (customer) is longing to hear. Put him on a flying horse of hope and pack him off. It's your astuteness that makes your fortune in this business and the gift of the gab that you possess proves how correct your predictions are." Shastriji's comments regarding this are crucial, 'making predictions based on the old tomes of astrology is to be the author of one's own trouble. The Jatak Granths (the ancient books on astrology) have been written centuries ago, with relevance to the agricultural society of that age. We are living in an altogether different age today. Every day we hear of a new invention. 'The moon is a watery expansion' was what we were taught in our Grahashastra (a tome in astrology). But the astronauts who stepped out of their spacecraft and walked on the surface of the moon tell us that there is

not even a drop of water on the moon. All that is there are the huge craters made by the meteors constantly striking on the Moon's surface. Human civilization has progressed by leaps and bounds. But the Jatak Shastra still moves at a snail's pace in the middle ages. It is not able to modify and adjust with the changing world. Not only this, but it also shows that Jatak has not reached the degree of exactness and flawlessness as science. All that it has is only conjectures; all that we predict is only a guess or an estimate; the whole business is just a fine talk of hollow optimism. Once in a blue moon you may come across an astrologer who is able to predict somewhat accurately. But that comes not because of his study of Jatak-shastra but because of his intuition; and he does not hide this fact. Unfortunately I never had any such intuition.'

Being convinced of the hollowness of fortune telling, finally Shastriji decided to close down his shop. While doing this he expresses his anguish regarding this whole business of astrology that tormented his heart, 'How long can I keep deceiving the people and myself? I am disgusted with it. At last I realized that astrology cannot be my profession to earn my bread and butter. Selecting some religious observances to atone the mal influence of planets on the individuals and obliging them to undertake those observances is surely not my cup of tea. I had enough of this mental stress and could endure it no more. Then, on one fine morning, I pulled down the nameplate of my office with my own hands and have never touched any book on astrology since then and have totally abstained from all kinds of astrological predictions.' Shastriji could not continue his business of astrology because of his indubitable honesty and total lack of greed.

Shastriji despised using ambiguous language of astrologers to convince the customers of the veracity of their predictions. So he preferred to close his shop, his only means of earning. Those eminent established astrologers with little care for honesty and integrity cannot afford the courage of conviction shown by Shastriji. This is a slap in the face of all astrologers doing roaring business by another erstwhile astrologer who has studied astrology thoroughly and is disillusioned because of its baseless postulations and hypotheses.

Astrology tells us that the nature of every individual-his virtues and his defects-is determined by the influence the planets have on him. The influence of the Sun, the Moon and the planet Jupiter makes a person Satvaguni- i.e. he imbibes truth, intellectual light and morality- all virtues a person can possess; influence of the planets Maercury and Venus makes him Rajoguni- i.e. given to passion, sensual desire, worldly

coveting and pride; and the influence of Mars, Saturn, Rahu-Ketu makes a person Tamoguni-he has traits of darkness and is blinded with lust, anger, pride and ignorance. An individual behaves, i.e. does good or bad things according to these traits. Here, the astrologers seem to have thrown human logic to dogs (the brain and the mind of the astrologers seem to be completely eclipsed by Rahu-Ketu.) Only man has the ability to discern whether what he does is good or bad. The planets, which according to Astrology, determine the nature of individuals and what an individual will do or not do according to his predetermined nature cannot make any decision whether a certain deed is good or bad. They are millions of kilometers away from earth and are made up of gigantic but inanimate rocks. To conceive that such inanimate rocks can influence the behaviors of men and women on earth, from such huge distances, is not only irrational but also highly ludicrous. People believe in these irrational concepts of Astrology because they (the concepts) have acquired religious piety of Vedic antiquity. This superstition persists because of profound ignorance and fear psychosis. Both have to be eradicated. The retired High Court Judge Chandrashekhar Dharmadhikari warns that surrendering to astrology, gambling and begging makes a man wretched. We cannot afford to ignore this warning.



Humanism

A person who has not been completely alienated, who has remained sensitive and able to feel, who has not lost the sense of dignity, who is not yet "for sale", who can still suffer over the suffering of others, who has not acquired fully the having mode of existence - briefly, a person who has remained a person and not become a thing - cannot help feeling lonely, powerless, isolated in present-day society. He cannot help doubting himself and his own convictions, if not his sanity. He cannot help suffering, even though he can experience moments of joy and clarity that are absent in the life of his "normal" contemporaries. Not rarely will he suffer from neurosis that results from the situation of a sane man living in an insane society, rather than that of the more conventional neurosis of a sick man trying to adapt himself to a sick society. In the process of going further in his analysis, i.e. of growing to greater independence and productivity, his neurotic symptoms will cure themselves.

ERICH FROMM

Fear of Eclipse

Eclipses are occasional phenomena occurring in our solar system because of the movement of the planets with specific velocities. A Solar Eclipse takes place when moon's shadow passes over the earth's surface or in other words when the moon passes in front of the sun as seen from the earth. Lunar Eclipse occurs when the moon moves into the earth's shadow: i.e. when the earth passes between the sun and the moon. When the disk of the sun is completely blanked out by the disc of the moon, as seen from the earth, we call it 'total solar eclipse'. When the disk of the sun is partially blanked out it is called a partial solar eclipse. On the next new moon day, i.e. on Monday 3rd October, we will be able to see a partial solar eclipse. It will commence at 15 minutes past 4 pm and end at 13 minutes past 6 pm, lasting for 1 hour and 58 minutes.

People in our society harbor a sort of Phobia regarding eclipses. The partial eclipse about to occur also must have made many devout people anxious. They will read and reread passages from religious scriptures, repeat the name of their favourite deities counting beads on the rosary (all this comes under japajapya) and give away sumptuous Dan-Dakshina to the family priest on his bidding. Whether they can afford the cost or spare the time is immaterial. They must carry out all the prescribed poojas, Japajapya and Dan-Dakshina in order to stop any untoward things from happening as an outcome of the eclipse. What causes the fear of the eclipse in the minds of people? Is all this fussing about the eclipse necessary?

Scientists have discovered how eclipses occur and what effects they can cause. The media, especially the electronic media, these days, explain all this in very simple language, giving ample illustrations. This is taught in the schools too. It is difficult to find a student who does not know what an eclipse is, or how it occurs. As explained already the geometric alignment of the planets cause eclipses and transits. Eclipses

occur according to natural laws and the shadows on the sun or the moon that darken their surfaces pass away according to the time of occultation that is regulated by the velocities of the planets. Why, then, many of us are still anxious about these regularly happening natural phenomena?

To trace the cause of this phobia, we have to go back to the Vedas. In the Rigveda it is said, 'a very powerful daemon from the skies tormented and hid the sun in darkness; but the sage Atri discovered and rescued him from the daemon. No one else but Atri could achieve this feat.' In those ancient days, even the sages were not able to divulge the mystery of a solar or a lunar eclipse. They imagined that divine wrath or benevolence causes all the strange inexplicable phenomena; and eclipse was one such phenomenon. In those days when the sun suddenly got cut off (partially or completely) from view it certainly was a cause to be frightened. People thought that the daemon is swallowing the sun and shouted and beat drums as hard as possible to shoo the daemon away and leave their sun alone. Even today some tribal people still retain these old notions that 'Rahu tries to swallow the sun and if he succeeds the human race and the earth are doomed.' These myths from the Puranic tomes still sway the minds of pious people.

Shri N.B. Adamne from Junnar (Pune district) possesses a large collection of very old manuscripts. One of them is a Hindu Almanac of 1843. This is a peculiar almanac because it illustrates various stages of an eclipse in colourful drawings. One of the drawings shows the daemon Rahu with a dagger in his hand while in another picture Rahu is obliterating the sun. Many other misconceptions regarding eclipses prevail in the minds of our people. During the eclipse, people from the Konkan area believe, if you keep a wooden pestle (for pounding rice) in the water in a Parat (a biggish edged metal dish) it will stay erect as long as the eclipse lasts. It falls flat as soon as the eclipse is over. Many people believe that one should not bathe, shave or eat during the eclipse. Pregnant women should remain in the bed and avoid seeing the eclipse. Women are told not to cut vegetables; avoid dung-washing the ground, walls, etc. They are threatened with dire consequences such as abortion, leprosy, distorted fingers, etc. if they flout these edicts.

A rational outlook will reveal that these notions engendered by the mythological stories are meaningless. The real purpose of creating mythological stories was to tell the historical truth to the people in a story form. But the stories gradually grew in mystery, exaggeration and fantasy; the original purpose of narrating history-what happened in the

past- was forgotten altogether. This is what has happened regarding the myth about eclipse. This myth tells us, 'Mohini cut off Rahu's head but Rahu who had drunk the Amrit (the nectar of immortality) and had become immortal tried to swallow the sun to take revenge. This is what causes the solar eclipse. The whole thing is simply imagination. But people like such flights of imagination. They enjoy it but become superstitious in the bargain.

In fact the planet Rahu who is supposed to be swallowing the sun does not exist. It is an arbitrary point where the paths of the moon's and earth's revolution intersect. The whole myth of Rahu swallowing the sun is shaken by the discovery of this fact. It means there is no danger to the sun during the eclipse, nor is the human race endangered because of it. But the fear of eclipse still captures the religious minds due to these myths and secondly due to the dread of the influence of planets on human life which is invented by astrologers. Astrology makes gullible people believe that the planets constantly influence human life, for better or for worse although there is no scientific basis for this assumption.

According to the theory of gravity, the gravitational force between two objects is directly proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. The distances of the planets from us are so vast that when we divide the product of the mass of a human being and that of the planet by the square of the distance between them the quotient is almost zero. It means the planet have no gravitational effect on human beings. The dread of these planets that we have been harbouring in our minds for ages is, thus as senseless as it is unfounded and also an indication of our ignorance. The pundits also tell us that during an eclipse idols of deities get sullied, so they should be kept submerged in water. There is not an iota of truth in this notion. Since the eclipse does not cause any dust storm, no dust is likely to gather on the idols. The wooden pounding pestle supposed to remain erect as long as the eclipse lasts is another baseless notion. The pestle will stand erect, eclipse or no eclipse, if the surface of its bottom is flat and wide enough to provide it a good stable base. Interested people can verify this fact themselves, though a wooden pounding pestle is difficult to obtain in the present times as the chaff of the grain is now removed by machines.

On 11th of August 1999, total solar eclipse was telecast on the TV Door Darshan channel along with an explanation by Dr. Gupta, the famous gynecologist, regarding effect of eclipse on the embryo. He

explained that the embryo developing in the womb is well protected and may be affected only by ultraviolet rays. The embryo grows in a unique fluid and no invisible or visible rays can reach up to it. The eclipse period is no exception to this and therefore there is no need for a pregnant woman to remain in bed. A pregnant woman should take all the normal precautions necessary for watching the solar eclipse and enjoy the grand but rare celestial phenomenon like all other human beings. She should also carry on all the other routine jobs of the household. The Shastris and Pundits are telling us that the solar eclipse taking place on the 3rd of October will cause trouble to those who belong to the Mithun (Gemini), Kanya (Virgo), Tula (Libra) and Kumbh (Aquarius) signs of the zodiac. This is an attempt to prop up the astrological sham. Whether one belongs to this or that zodiac sign is immaterial since the fact remains that an eclipse cannot cause any adverse or beneficial effect on any human being. Wisdom lies in giving away - food, money- whatever you must to those who are in dire need of it; food to the beggars begging for food, money to the students who cannot afford tuition fees. There is no need to appease any deities or planets through the agency of the family Purohit.

29 Sept, 2005



Brahminism

Brahminism is nothing but a crafty profession under the guise of religion and has knack of appearing under false pretences. It is gross and sexual, and yet appears to be refined and spiritual. It is vicious and crooked and yet pretends to be moral; worldly and yet seems to be religious. Such a system should be destroyed ruthlessly for the very spirit of Brahminism is inimical to the good of humanity. It represents a feudal form of capitalism and exploits the wealth of the rich under the form of Daksina which is the life force of Brahminism.

Religious Blindness

The will to believe induces in religious people a variety of blindness for which there seems to be no cure. Apparently educated people, whom one would expect to be acquainted with at least the elements of logic, will, with the utmost seriousness make the most ridiculous statements which will send the non-believer into convulsions of laughter.

R D KARVE

Tsunami: Fear Psychosis Created by Astrology

On the 26th of December last year, a severe earth quake violently shook the Sumatra Island in Indonesia. It generated a tsunami with such gigantic tides that within minutes thousands of men, women and children were washed away into the angry ocean. (So far, it is said, more than 150 thousand people have perished in the tsunami.) Many other countries like India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Thailand were severely affected by this earthquake. The tides that rocked practically the whole world have waned and efforts to rehabilitate the displaced people have started. Aid is pouring from all the regions in the world. Our defence personnel and young volunteers are reaching up to the displaced people even at the risk to their own lives.

At the same time, our eminent astrologers however, are busy predicting the adverse effects that tsunami is likely to cause on people of certain zodiac signs and creating more fear in the minds of the displaced people. According to their prediction, the four zodiac signs Kark, Simha, Mesh and Vrishchik (Cancer, Leo, Aries and Scorpio respectively) have started suffering the ill effects of Sadesati (a period of grievous calamities lasting seven and a half years.) Their intention is to suggest that the latest earthquake is the result of this Sadesati. They also predict that from the second week of January 2005 till the end of May, the round of the planet Saturn being in the zodiac sign of Gemini will cause earthquakes, famines, cyclones and destroy cattle and wealth, etc.

Should one believe these predictions based on the positions of the planets in the space? We have got to think rationally what is wrong in believing such predictions and also what really causes earthquakes and the consequent destruction of life and property. According to research in geology, an earthquake so severe as to cause a tsunami occurs rarely once in a century*. The tectonic plate at the bottom of the ocean shifts causing huge waves and earthquake. There are instruments that predict tsunamis;

but they are too costly and not affordable to our country. But the government has now decided to purchase this costly equipment.

Stupidity of the astrological predictions

As said earlier the predictions of the astrologers are senseless. But let us dwell on the astronomical reasons why their predictions are senseless. The gravitational force between two objects is directly proportional to the product of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them. There is enormous distance between the earth and any planet in the space. If you square this distance the figure will be too big and when you divide the product of the masses of the earth and any planet the quotient you get is almost zero. Thus no planet can exert enough force to cause a tsunami on the earth. In comparison the distance between the earth and the moon is very small while the mass of the ocean waters is considerably large to cause high and low tides. But the same gravitational force that causes high tide in ocean cannot affect the water kept in bowl on your dining table, because the mass of the water in the bowl, in comparison to that in the ocean is negligible. So prediction of tsunamis or attributing the occurrence of a tsunami to certain planet moving into certain zodiac sign is the height of stupidity. Another such silly notion that instills fear in the minds of people is Sadesati-the calamitous period lasting seven and a half years and occurring in every individual's life once or twice.

Many people believe in these stupid notions, mainly for a dual reason. It is the tremendous ignorance of the common people coupled with the sharp intellect of the professional pundits of astrology who indulge in such predictions. The common people fall into their trap easily. The guidance given by Adya Shankaracharya will prove very useful here. He has clearly told us, 'it is a folly to blindly believe a statement made by an individual just because he is very learned. The final criterion of truth is observation and direct evidence and not all the tomes the learned one happen to have read.' Now let us verify the predictions made by the astrologers with reference to Adya Shankaracharya's guidance. When astrology is examined on the scientific criteria of observation, inference, experiment and conclusion, it becomes obvious that it depends only on observation and inference. The inferences drawn in astrology are never put to test by more observations, experiments and suitable tests. For lack of repeated experiments and verification their predictions cannot become universal like scientific predictions. So all that is said and predicted in the name of astrology is nothing but hocus pocus. Using ambiguous language of 'if

and then', and making predictions that can mean anything is the skill the astrologer needs to squeeze money out of the gullible ignorant people. The astrology books are revered like the religious scriptures, which the common people believe and rever.

Astrological predictions are very commonly used for creating a fear psychosis. Michel Nostradamus the famous mystic diviner of France, who lived in the 16th century, can truly be called the great grand dad of all astrologers. He wrote a mystical epic named 'Centauries' the interpretation of which predicted a horrible future of wide spread earthquakes, fires, murders, skirmishes and what not. A horror film was made on his prediction of earthquake and shown in Los Angelis where a great commotion erupted and people started running helter skelter. Many abandoned their homes. Many became helpless. But the most important fact to be noted is that the prediction of Nostradamus never came true.

Conjunction of two planets is a very commonly observed phenomenon. There should be nothing to fear about it. But the astrologers interpret it as an omen of some calamity and make such alarming predictions that gullible people are scared to death. The astrologers also claim to know effective rituals which when performed under their supervision appease the planets and mitigate the calamities. However all these predictions and the remedies to mitigate the possible calamities caused by conjunction of planets are totally baseless. But people read their predictions with enthusiasm fall prey to the fear psychosis and spread it.

Chaos caused by the prediction of deluge

On one such occasion of conjunction of planets, on 8th May 1999, astrologers had predicted that the whole world will be inundated destroying everything. This prediction was endorsed by 'Mahalakshmi Samarat', a magazine published from Dilly. People, especially those living by the sea side were scared to death. People of Mumbai wanted to run away from the city with all their bag and baggage. The railway platforms as well as the state transport terminuses were full of people trying to run away from the seashore. The fear psychosis adversely affected many manufacturing activities by the long seashore of Gujarat. Workers fled from Alang, the busy port in Gujarat, famous for its ship breaking industry, leaving a deserted waterfront behind. The fishermen were scared of losing their home and hearth and their means of livelihood. Finally scientists unequivocally assured the public that no deluge is going to occur and there is no cause, what so ever, to fear and

flee from the shore. Finally the predicted dooms day arrived and as assured by the scientists, to the relief of all, nothing happened; no inundation, no deluge, no destruction of non-believers. People saw for themselves that the astrologers' prediction was totally wrong.

One year later, another dooms day prediction was made by our astrologers. On 8th of May 2000 the great planets - the Sun, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were going to get closest to one another in a grand conjunction. Astrologers predicted that this great conjunction will cause undue strain on the solid outer crust of the earth which will then crack and cause huge earthquakes and eruption of volcanoes; distinct land masses (the earth plates) will collide and cause tsunamis carrying away thousands of human beings and drowning them. Astrology Columns of all magazines were full of such predictions. People were petrified. But even on this occasion nothing untoward happened and the astrologers and their predictions, once again, were proved to be bogus. It is quite natural for a layman to argue, "When the ocean waters surge in high tide due to gravitation of the Moon, is it not likely for the earth's crust to crack when so many planets are stacked against it with all their gravitational force pulling it in one direction? Is this not serious enough to cause chaos?" Here one must remember that the gravitational force is inversely proportional to the distance between these planets and the earth. These distances being enormous the total gravitational force of all these planets is negligible as compared to that of the moon that is much too closer to earth. Conjunctions of any number of planets cannot cause any destruction or upheavals on earth.

Some professional astrologers predict world wars from time to time as repercussions of some eclipses. Some others predict attempts on the life of some great leaders on the basis of their horoscopes. All these are attempts to instill fear in the minds of those who believe in astrology. No two nations go to war unless their mutual relations get extremely sour. Souring of relations between nations is in no way related to the positions of planets during eclipses. How can the attempt on the life of any great man be related to the lining up of many planets on one side of the earth? The astrologers cannot explain any of these anomalies. It is sad that these rumour mongering astrologers are so blinded by their self interest that they do not bother even if the rumours that they spread create a fear psychosis among the people hampering the progress of the nation.

13 Jan, 2005

The present book is published in 2012. The tsunami following the earth quake of Japan occurred six years after the Indonesian tsunami.

*

Phony Astrologers and Committed Police

On 24th August 'Gomantak' the popular newspaper flashed the news that the local police in Karasvada, Mhapsa, exposed a bogus astrologer. This self styled expert of Nadijyotish (a special type of astrology) had come from Turuvidai in Tanjaur and had set up his shop in Karasvada. He claimed to be a Nadijyotishi and looted many gullible people pretending to have acquired supernatural divine powers. However he could not evade the police when they raided his den and had to admit that he did not possess any divine power. It had a telling effect on the gullible people who used to gather around him. The police deserve to be congratulated for exposing this fraudulent Nadijyotishi Baba.

This throws light on the background in which such sham takes place. Some people were hand in hand with the Baba in this business and made a lot of money out of it. The Nadijyotishi Baba who cheated many people was himself pressed into this fraudulent business by the local thugs who extracted money from him. This was thus an immoral trade of dissolute people. It was quite natural for these men to try and protect their trade-their means of earning- even after the police raided the Baba. So they did all they could to put pressure on the police and prevent them from taking any action against the Baba.

Some political leaders, who are devoted disciples of great spiritual Gurus who are busy sermonizing on morality, used their political clout to stop the police action (restraining the police, for that matter, is one of the many businesses of the politicians and is eulogized as social service); but the police did not budge an inch. They went ahead with dedication and exposed the Baba completely.

This awakened the people who became watchful about their being swindled. Nadijyotishi Baba's income dropped. Yet there are quite a few who firmly believe that 'the Baba does possess supernatural power; how

will he, otherwise, divine anyone's past and predict future?' So they regularly go to the Baba to ask for his favour.

Here, it would be quite interesting to know as to how the Baba manages to divine someone's past and present so accurately. This Nadijyotish business runs traditionally in a few families of Tanjavur called the Nadijyotishis. The sage Bhrigu, who lived thousands of years ago is supposed to have predicted the futures of all human beings, who would be born after him and written all his predictions on the leaves of Tad (Palmyra tree). These families from Tanjavur claim to possess those bundles of ancient Tadpatras written by Bhrigu.

Now the *modus operandi* of how the Nadijyotishi predicts the future. The customer who wants to know his future comes to the Nadijyotishi and enlists himself telling his name. The Tadpatra on which his future is written invariably happens to be there in the bundles of old leaves. All that remains to be done is to search for it and interpret the old language in which it is written. As the Nadijyotishi requires some time for this, the customer is asked to come again the next day. Next day, on the arrival of the customer the Nadijyotishi searches for a little while and takes out the Tadpatra belonging to that particular customer. That leaf contains many incidents that happened in the customer's life! The customer is much impressed and humbled. Does the Nadijyotishi have a real ancient Tadpatra written in his name? Of course not. How then some incidents of his past life happen to be mentioned on it? It can be explained thus. When the Nadijyotishi asks the customer to see him next day again, one of his assistants follows him to help find a good hotel, eating place, a lodge at reasonable price, etc. This talkative fellow asks the customer many questions regarding his family, service, health, relatives and what not. There are questions regarding the past life of the customer who answers them unsuspectingly. The helpful assistant then relates all this information to his boss, the Nadijyotishi, who writes all that on a fresh Tadpatra and dips it in a certain chemical to make it look ancient. This is that Tadpatra which we are told was written by the sage Bhrigu thousands of years back. The Nadijyotishi searches out this Tadpatra from various bundles and shows it to the customer. The script being unfamiliar the customer is not able to read it and here again, the Nadijyotishi has to come to his help. He readily helps him read out the details that the customer has told his assistant.

With some operational differences, here and there, almost all Nadijyotishi follow the same *modus operandi*. The Nadijyotishi at Karasvada with whom we started this narrative, used to tell his customer

to make another visit after a lapse of a month. His assistants during this period would collect much more information about the customer and fleece him as much as they could. The victims of this fraud were not only the gullible and ignorant poor. Some of the victims were doctors with good practice, engineers and other professionals. But not one of them took the trouble to find out why with all his divine powers does the Nadijyotishi take so long to find the correct Tadpatra of any particular customer? This is what should concern us more.

There are two reasons why people fall prey to the vicious scheming Nadijyotishi or any other Baba-Buva. Firstly the fraudulent Baba-Buvas' attire of a great Yogi, their grave awe inspiring faces smeared with ashes create an aura of divinity. Sant Tukaram had warned us not to be taken by the outward appearance and show of these Babas, but we forget his rational advice and pray him like a deity to shower favours on us. The second reason is the claims these Babas make. They claim to have acquired mystic, supernatural, divine powers. This claim that people believe to be true has been time and again proved false through thorough scientific investigations in the western countries. The simple rationale is that when no such powers can exist, there is no question of anybody possessing them. Our revered saints never made any such false claims of possessing supernatural powers. They even refuted that such powers exist. But our Haradas (minstrels) relate marvelous exploits of our gods and heroes with music and chanting and concocted idle stories regarding our great saints to make their rendition more interesting. And many of us believed them to be true. We chose to feel assured that the supernatural powers of the gods and of some mortals like our saints are capable of pulling us out of our difficulties.

It's high time that we realize that man alone can make or break his own future and no Baba-Buva, Maharaj or Mataji are capable of alleviating our circumstances. There is nobody in this world who possesses any supernatural powers because such powers that defy natural laws simply do not exist.



Futile Oracles of the East

Annashastri was an old man of 60 odd years when I saw him as a child in our village. He was a man of medium height, wearing a 'Barabandi' chemise and a scarf wrapped round his head. Half his teeth were gone. He used spectacles with a thin rim. He could always be seen sitting in the courtyard of his house with a roof of matted Palmira leaves, busy inspecting somebody's horoscope or Prashnakundali and a crowd of villagers sitting in front of him.

Prashnakundali is somewhat like the ancient oracle of the west. Prashnakundali or Prashnottaree is a case paper of one's fortunes or destinies composed not from the horoscope at birth but from the aspects etc. presiding at the moment of inquiry. The crowd in front of Annashastri was those villagers who wanted their questions answered. These poor people earned very little and their questions also used to be very simple; mostly about things or cattle that were lost; or finding some auspicious time. Someone would want to know the auspicious time for transplantation of rice clumps. Annashastri would look into the Panchanga (Hindu Almanac) kept in front of him and tell the auspicious time. The person asking that question would put a small coin on the square stool and leave. Another fellow would entreat him, almost weeping, to figure out when his lost cattle would be found. He would narrate, 'the animal went into the jungle in the morning as usual but has failed to return home and it is already dark'. Annashastri would do some calculations and meanwhile ask many questions to get more details about the lost cattle. The villagers would tell him all that happened in the surroundings - a tiger's roars are heard since the last week; a bullock of one villager is lost which must have been killed by the tiger; another villager bought a male calf etc. By this time Annashastri used to complete his calculations and would be ready with his answer. He would answer, 'your cattle would return in a couple of days; however if it fails to return

by that time then there is no hope of its returning ever after.' The villager would then leave accepting his fate.

Once I asked Annashastri, 'uncle, how do you predict the future and answer these peoples' questions?' He promptly answered, 'that you will come to know automatically as you grow up and raise your own family.' And I did come to know the secret of Annashastri's predictions as I grew older and wiser. In the language of Astrology, the customer who approaches the astrologer expecting some answer is called 'Jatak'. The questions that the Jataks ask are quite common, such as- when will the house be ready? When will he get promotion? Someone lost his ring while roaming about in the open; when will he be able to find it? Who will win the India Vs Pakistan match? Etc. The astrologer constructs a horoscope according to the timing when the question is asked because that time is supposed to be the time of the question's birth. Many methods are devised to predict answers; one very popular method is called 'Krishnamoorti', in which the horoscope of the question is of much importance. But at times an astrologer following this method finds himself in a difficult situation. E.g. suppose there are two candidates standing against each other for the same post; both are equally likely to be elected making it difficult to predict who wins. Both of them approach the astrologer at the same time and ask him, 'who will win?' Since they ask an identical question at the same time, the horoscopes of their questions too should be identical. Both should according to the horoscope either win or lose which is not possible. One of them ought to win and the other to lose. Here the astrologer has to adopt another method. The persons who ask the same question at the same time are asked to pick any number from 1 to 249. The possibility of both picking the same number being remote, the astrologer is now able to make two different horoscopes giving different predictions.

Pandit Mahadeo Shastri Joshi, who compiled the 10 volumes of the encyclopedia-'Bharatiya Sanskriti Kosh', had studied Phalajyotish (Astrology) at the Sanskrit Pathashala in Sangli. He returned to Goa after he completed his study of Vedas and opened his office of Astrology in Panaji. Soon Jataks started visiting him. Mahadeo Shastri studiously made their Prashnakundalis and answered their questions on the basis of those Kundalis. But the answers he gave turned out to be wrong more often than not. If on the basis of the horoscope, he told a Jatak that his cow would take 15 days to return home, she would turn up the same evening. When this happened all too often, Shastriji consulted another well established senior astrologer. The senior astrologer revealed the trick of

the trade. He told, 'look, predictions based on the basis of ancient astrological theories given in the old books turn out to be false. What you need in this business is a wily devious tongue. You should first observe the Jatak in front of you very carefully and then tell him what he wishes to know. The predictions should not be gloomy; they should give him hope. Pack him off on a flying horse of hopes. The more impressive and inspiring your talk is the more accurate (and acceptable) your predictions will appear.' Mahadeo Shastri, a Pandit honest to the core, was stunned after hearing this secret of the trade. It was not possible for him to deceive himself and his customers. He wound up and pulled the shutters down on astrology for good.

23 Sept, 2004



Racial Differences

The whole world over, there are confrontations between sections of mankind defined by a difference of race, nationality, economic philosophy, religion or language so that one is not the 'neighbour' to the other. These more or less arbitrary differences among peoples who are members of a single biological species are terribly dangerous, and nowhere more so than here in the United States, where the most perilous confrontation is between white and black.

Next to the population problem generally, mankind faces no danger greater than this confrontation, particularly in the United States. It seems to me that more and more, each year, both whites and blacks are turning, in anger and hatred, to violence, I see no reasonable end to the steady escalation but an actual civil war.

In such a civil war, the whites, with a preponderance of numbers and an even greater preponderance of organized power, would in all likelihood 'win'. They would do so, however, at an enormous material cost, and I suspect, at a fatal spiritual one.

Is the privilege of feeling hatred so luxurious that it is worth the material and spiritual hell of a white-black civil war? If the answer is really yes, one can only despair.

ISAAC ASIMOV

(For the Indian context substitute Hindu for white and Muslim for black)

Judicial Verdict and Students' Future

Presently a heated debate, in the field of education, is raging between the supporters and critics of astrology. The topic on which there is such an intense controversy is the verdict of the Supreme Court regarding the introduction of astrology as a subject of study at the University level. The University Grants Commission (UGC) had decided to introduce Astrology as a subject of study in the Universities. Against this decision of the UGC, public interest litigation was filed in the court pleading it to declare the UGC decision illegal. The plea was not accepted by the court. The reason given by the court for rejecting the plea was quite logical and pertinent. But the supporters of astrology interpreted the verdict to suit their ideology. The general drift of their interpretation of the verdict was that the Supreme Court has declared that Phalajyotish (Astrology) is a science and the study of this subject in the universities cannot be banned. Most of them, it seemed, did not take the trouble to read the details of the verdict. The few who did, could not either comprehend the details correctly or pretended to misinterpret them and proclaimed that the Supreme Court have decided that Phalajyotish is a science.

Many backward-looking persons, making much of this opportunity, took delight in freely and insolently wagging their tongues against the progressive socialist opponents. Some of them even celebrated the occasion as a 'slap in the face of all progressive reformists' given by none other than the Supreme Court. Others even congratulated and thanked the Honorable Judge for elevating Phalajyotish to the stature of science. No wonder, the common man is totally confused. It is, therefore, necessary to explain the background of the public litigation and the true meaning of the Supreme Court's verdict.

During the regime of the National Democratic Alliance, Shri Murali Manohar Joshi was the Minister of Human Resource Development. He has a deep faith in the Vedang Jyotish. (Vedang Jyotish is one of the six

sacred sciences considered to be subordinate to and also part of the Vedas.) Joshiji was bent on introducing the study of the subject of his deep faith at the University level. So, as soon as he got the charge of Human resource development, he quickly moved to introduce the Vedang Jyotish into the curriculum of higher education.

Challenge of Progressive Organizations

To initiate the study of this subject, it was necessary for it to be approved by the UGC for introducing the subject in the University Curriculum. The Regulatory Committee of the UGC met on the 16th of June 2000, discussed the issue and approved in principle to introduce Vedang Jyotish into the curriculum. Next a committee of nine experts in this subject was appointed with the blessings of Shri Murali Manohar Joshi. The Committee prepared a curriculum for post graduate and doctorate degrees. Since the word Vedang Jyotish reeks of ancient and orthodox traditionalism, it was given a new name, 'Jyotirvidnyan' to make it sound modern and scientific. Wheels moved very fast then. All formalities were completed with lightening speed. Finally Jyotirvidnyan did become part of the Curriculum at the University level. Joshiji thus accomplished his mighty undertaking.

Introduction of Phalajyotish or astrology, which cannot be validated on scientific tests, in a modern scientific garb as Jyotirvidnyan, naturally evoked a strong reaction from many progressive organizations and reformist movements. In Goa the Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti of Goa and the Samata Andolan, both made representations for not introducing this subject in the University Curriculum. The then Vice Chancellor of the Goa University responded very favourably. Like the Universities of Pune and Mumbai which refused to introduce this subject in the Curriculum, he too had decided to refuse to introduce it in his University's Curriculum.

The UGC's decision to introduce Jyotirvidnyan set both the scientists and the progressive intelligentsia agog. A PIL was filed in the Andhra Pradesh High Court against the UGC's decision. The petitioners were Padmabhooshan Dr. P.M. Bhargav, Director of the Biotechnological Institution; Professor K. Subhash Chandra Reddi, Head of the Department of Politics, Usmania University and the famous journalist Ms Chandana Chakravarti. Their main plea was to prevent UGC from introducing Phalajyotish into the Curriculum. However, the High Court decided that 'since taking decisions regarding the curriculum is the prerogative of the experts' committee, the court need not interfere into

the matter.' The appellants, then, approached the Supreme Court.

The chief advocate of the appellants was the renowned jurist Shantibhushan. He stressed two important points.

1. Nobody in the world has been able to prove that the subject called Jyotirvidnyan has a scientific base; and
2. Scientific outlook means examining the cause-effect relation between phenomena.

But it is totally absent in this subject. Therefore the study of this subject is likely to teach students to be inconsistent with the duties stipulated in the constitution (viz. inculcating scientific outlook). In addition introducing this subject of Jyotirvidnyan in the University Curriculum will help Safronize the education system; and will contradict the lofty principle of Secularism that is the core of the constitution.

Before giving his verdict, the judge clarified the scope of the intended judgment. He said, 'The question before us is restricted to -whether astrology should or should not be taught at the university level, whether teaching this subject will Safronize education and whether the core of our constitution-the principle of secularism- is infringed.' After this the verdict on the appeal was announced. According to the details of the verdict, 'the decision of including Jyotirvidnyan in the curriculum has been taken by the experts' committee of the UGC. Which course of study should be introduced and which should be altered are academic questions. They are relevant to education and the court certainly has the right to speak about them but at the same time the convention is not to comment on them. Court's interference in the curriculum decided upon by the experts committee which is constituted legitimately is not necessary.'

The allegation of the so called Safronization of education was rebutted by the court. The 1971 verdict given in the case of the DAV College vs. the Punjab State was cited in support of this decision. The cultural and religious influence of the life and teaching of Guru Nanak on our nation and the world was a subject of study in the Guru Nanak University. An appeal was made to ban this study from the university curriculum as it seems to propagate the Sikh religion. But the verdict in this case made it clear that objections can be raised against specific rituals and worships of any religion; but the influence of the life and thoughts of any great saint on our nation and the world cannot be considered as propaganda of any particular religion. This was the gist of

the Supreme Court's verdict. It becomes clear when it is studied minutely that no where does it say that Astrology is a Science. So the unabashed celebration of 'triumph' by the supporters of Astrology is not only meaningless but in addition it misleads people.

Relief from the eclipse

On the 13th of June 2001, the experts committee of the UGC gave its approval to introduce Astrology that is not scientifically validated, in the university curriculum. All this took place under the guidance of Shri Murali Manohar Joshi. It was nothing but fooling around with the future of the students; no less than an eclipse over the domain of education. In the recent elections, however, the NDA was defeated at the hustings and Murali Manohar Joshi lost the ministry of Human Resource Development. The eclipse over the domain of education came to an end. It was a pity that during the preceding three years students were subjected to this covert gambling called Phalajyotish. But things are changing for the better now. To improve the whole system of education, UGC should now quickly reorganize all its various experts' committees and end this gamble of Phalajyotish.

6 Aug, 2004



Hypocrisy Rampant

Truth stands no chance in a world full of shams. Honesty is theoretically recognised as virtue, but if you try to put into practice, you will soon find it is a prohibited virtue. Hypocrisy is the order of the day. Honesty is supposed to be good for children, so invent lies in order to impress the value of the truth upon them. The story of George Washington refusing to tell a lie and the one about Napoleon sticking medals in advance to commemorate his anticipated victory over England, are well known lies invented for the benefit of children. The copy book maxim about honesty being the best policy does not sufficiently strike the imagination, so we must invent stories that will. Honest teachers may, indeed go so far as to put undue emphasis on the word "policy" and point out that honesty is not considered desirable for its own sake, but only as a policy. Of course, it does not take long to find out that it is not even the best "policy" and that one may get into extremely hot water by putting it to the test.

R.D. KARVE

Spirituality on Sale in this Ashram

The present age is known as the age of Globalization and Merchandization. Even values are merchandised. No one would have believed earlier that water would be sold as a commodity. But today drinking water has become a commodity in the world market under some brand of mineral water. Can spirituality too be sold? Why doubt it? In the present times spirituality is a very profitable commodity and there are many five starred and seven starred Baba-Buvas-Matajis who are millionaire merchants of spirituality. They own palatial mansions in several countries, which are known as 'Ashrams' in spiritual parlance. A large crowd of disciples and devotees that include fair-skinned damsels and a fleet of hundreds of cars are in attendance wherever they go.

In Valikakavoo, a village in Kerala, there is a monastery called 'Amritapuri'. It is in fact a palatial Ashram well equipped with all modern and ultramodern facilities. This seven starred Amritapuri Ashram is ruled preeminently by Mata Amritanandamayee. This Mataji sells Spirituality like a very costly commodity in the corporate world. In the trade of spirituality she has created a niche for herself. Her Ashram has investments amounting to over two crores and has raised hospitals and educational institutions. It also has a private TV channel that is mainly used for the management of the Ashram.

Recently the 50th birthday of Mataji was celebrated on a grand scale. The pomp and pageantry of the birthday bash that was called 'Amritvarsham 50' was beyond imagination. The huge Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, in the city of Kochi was booked not for a day but for four days in a row. The festival was truly global for which the expenditure totaled up to 15 crores. Being a festival on global scale high level political and government dignitaries and notable industrialists were invited. The numbers of VVIPs who were present was significant. Mataji herself is known for her simple living and always wears plain white clothes. She

just cannot stand any pomp and show. She often expresses her disdain for pompous display. Spending 15 crores on birthday celebration sounds like a paradox but let us find out why this birthday bash was organized in the first place. We get some clues when we look into the well thought out way it was planned. All this was planned by a team of indigenous professionals.

The team was led by Balgopal alias Amrita-swarupananda, the vice president of the Amritapuri Ashram. He was the author of the whole idea of planning a birthday bash. The main office of the American Amritanandamayee mission is situated in Sanrmon and is managed by Mr. Rot Gotsegen. Rot Gotsegen was the driving force behind the birthday festival. It was for him a great occasion for the summit of C.E.O.s of very powerful industrial conglomerates. The subject of discussion in the summit was 'what is needed to make India a global economic power'. The agenda of the programme was publicized in a big way.

Many plans were made to build up and expand business relations between Indian and multinational industrial corporations and the Amritapuri Ashram of the simple ascetic Mataji. These plans, as it was given to understand, are expected to increase the business of the Ashram tenfold during the next five years; although what exactly the plans are is a secret well kept. But the official news released from the Ashram disclosed that plans for turning India into a Major Economic World Power have been made and Mataji will go through and give a finishing touch to the plans. The details can be made known to the public only after final approval of the plans by Mataji. (Now a few impish minds do indulge in gossiping, 'how can the uneducated Mataji who does not know the head or tail of Economics make such big plans?' Wise men should ignore them, for the simple reason that after attaining spiritual power, as has been achieved by her, she is able to understand anything and everything in the world.) Taking cognizance of Mataji's unprecedented contribution to the corporate world, her disciple -manager, Balgopal, has bestowed the epithet, 'Global C.E.O.' on her.

Mataji is very closely connected with many senior political leaders. The Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. Anthony attended the summit organized during birthday celebrations. The then Prime minister Atalbihari Bajpei and the Deputy Prime Minister Advani were like her own sons to Mataji as claimed by her in her public sermons.

Amritanandamayee has always kept herself engaged in some

occupation. Her dealings, though, do not always go through smoothly. E.g. the Ashram has lodged a complaint against one of its own trustees, Shri P.K. Rajappan. This shows that all is not well in the Ashram. Rajappan is accused of having borrowed money from Mataji at 20% interest in 1982 and not returning it so far. The interesting thing here is that just one year before launching this complaint, the Amritanandamayee Mission was registered as a charitable institution. The complaint itself points out that Amritanandamayee is a Sanyasin. (Now a Sanyasi, i.e. an ascetic is generally believed by a layman to be preoccupied with the service of God. But the money lending occupation of this Sanyasi proves this belief to be a superstition, for the Sanyasi in question here, along with money lending, is also involved in many other dealings, very much like many of our political and social leaders.)

In his rejoinder to Mataji's complaint Rajappan said, 'I did take gold ornaments from Mataji and she took a promissory note from me for the value of the ornaments with 20% interest added to it. Our interest here is not the proceedings of the lawsuit but the fact that this seven starred Mataji was also a moneylender! (This is a crime according to the Kerala Government Act of 1958 banning money lending.)

Many devotees complain of frequent atrocities taking place in the Ashram. None of these complaints are systematically investigated; and those who complain happen to die mysteriously. The mission receives a huge amount of foreign funds and is the second highest foreign fund beneficiary in India. In the year 2002, the mission received nearly rupees 150 crores. Against this background a need to enhance the spiritual image of Mataji seems to have been felt. Booklets, replete with miracles performed by Mataji are, therefore, published and sold in the Ashram in large numbers. Many myths are narrated in these booklets; we mention here just a couple of them to give the reader a taste of the pudding.

Generally when a child is born normally, the mother experiences unbearable pain. But when our revered Mataji was born, her mother did not experience any labour pain what-so-ever! And the newborn Mataji did not cry like other infants. She had a smiling face when she entered this world and was not pushed out, head first, as in normal deliveries but was born sitting in 'Padmasan'. (Padmasan is a posture in religious meditation as depicted in the statues of the Buddha.) Moreover the tiny fingers of the infant Mataji were in Chinhamudra on birth. (There are several connotations of 'Mudra'. One meaning is -hands, feet, fingers or other body parts held in some precise position. This is called

Chinhamudra.) She is now able to convert water into milk and milk into Panchamrita -mixture of five nectarous substances, viz. milk, curd, clarified butter, honey and sugar supposed to be the five elements of immortality. May be, because of this supernatural ability of turning milk into Panchamrita, she is called Amritanandamayee!

7 Nov, 2004



What they said!

Ignorance or inability to seek the truth is what leads one to believe in god and his creation. So, the very thought of god is merely the outcome of one's ignorance. Conception of god is built on the bed-rock of mere guess.

Generally the belief in god is due to personal problems. One expects something from god and reposes strong faith in him in anticipation of getting one's objectives fulfilled whether one is intelligent or not.

Religion and god are nothing but mere fantastic fabrications.

They are merely imaginary. Both constitute a big hoax. Religion obstructs development of knowledge. It forbids its progress. It is reactionary in nature. That is why our people have not advanced. It teaches the doctrine of leading a life without working.

Rationalism is not at all new. In fact it is as old as the Buddha who condemned idolatry in all forms of worship of personal gods, ritualism and superstition.

THANDAI PERIYAR



Yadnyeshwar Nigale

Superstition

A Rational Discourse



- Educated in Goa and Maharashtra up to Degree in Science.
- More than 34 years in Government service.
- Received training in Social Work from The Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti and B. Premananda, the Rationalist of International Reputation.
- Delivered several public lectures and lectures in Schools and Colleges on Eradication of Superstition since 1994.
- Won the prestigious award given by the Gomantak Vidya Niketan, in the memory of the late Shri Keshav Anant Nayak, for Social Work for the year 2000.
- Won the 'Goache Inam'-Goa's Prize- given by Cyber Committee of Houston, Texas (USA), for the year 2004.
- Full time worker and Office Bearer of the Goa Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti.
- Delivered lectures in the Ladies' Workshops organized by the Goa Rural Development and Administration Department in the year 2007.
- Books Published: *Kisse Andhashraddheche*; a collection of Thought Provoking Articles on Superstition.

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